



US009222698B2

(12) **United States Patent**
McClanahan et al.

(10) **Patent No.:** **US 9,222,698 B2**
(45) **Date of Patent:** **Dec. 29, 2015**

(54) **HEATER FOR VAPORIZING LIQUIDS**

(71) Applicant: **Gaumer Company, Inc.**, Houston, TX
(US)

(72) Inventors: **Jack L. McClanahan**, Montgomery, TX
(US); **Craig S. Tiras**, Houston, TX (US)

(73) Assignee: **Gaumer Company, Inc.**, Houston, TX
(US)

(*) Notice: Subject to any disclaimer, the term of this
patent is extended or adjusted under 35
U.S.C. 154(b) by 72 days.

(21) Appl. No.: **14/252,965**

(22) Filed: **Apr. 15, 2014**

(65) **Prior Publication Data**

US 2014/0219644 A1 Aug. 7, 2014

Related U.S. Application Data

(63) Continuation of application No. 13/217,807, filed on
Aug. 25, 2011, now Pat. No. 8,728,219, which is a
continuation-in-part of application No. 12/584,610,
filed on Sep. 9, 2009, now Pat. No. 8,391,696, and a
continuation-in-part of application No. 12/584,626,
filed on Sep. 9, 2009, now Pat. No. 8,521,014, and a
continuation-in-part of application No. 12/584,640,
filed on Sep. 9, 2009, now Pat. No. 8,295,692, which is
a continuation-in-part of application No. 12/399,811,
filed on Mar. 6, 2009, now Pat. No. 8,103,156, which is
a continuation-in-part of application No. 12/029,957,
filed on Feb. 12, 2008, now abandoned.

(60) Provisional application No. 60/889,324, filed on Feb.
12, 2007.

(51) **Int. Cl.**
F24H 6/00 (2006.01)
B01D 3/02 (2006.01)
B01D 3/14 (2006.01)
B01D 1/00 (2006.01)

B01D 19/00 (2006.01)
F02M 21/06 (2006.01)
F28F 9/22 (2006.01)
F28F 13/06 (2006.01)
F24H 1/10 (2006.01)

(52) **U.S. Cl.**
CPC **F24H 6/00** (2013.01); **B01D 1/0011**
(2013.01); **B01D 1/0023** (2013.01); **B01D**
1/0076 (2013.01); **B01D 3/02** (2013.01); **B01D**
3/143 (2013.01); **B01D 19/0063** (2013.01);
F02M 21/06 (2013.01); **F24H 1/103** (2013.01);
F28F 9/22 (2013.01); **F28F 13/06** (2013.01);
F28F 2009/228 (2013.01); **Y02T 10/32**
(2013.01)

(58) **Field of Classification Search**

CPC .. B01D 1/0011; B01D 1/0017; B01D 1/0023;
B01D 1/0064; B01D 1/0076; B01D 1/0082;
B01D 1/04; B01D 1/30; B01D 1/305; B01D
3/02; B01D 3/04; B01D 3/14; B01D 3/143;
B01D 3/146; B01D 3/148; B01D 19/0036;
B01D 19/0063; B01D 19/0084; F24H 1/101;
F24H 1/102; F24H 1/103; F24H 6/00; B01B
1/005; C02F 1/04; C02F 1/043

See application file for complete search history.

(56) **References Cited**

U.S. PATENT DOCUMENTS

1,098,573 A 6/1914 Hauser
3,074,216 A * 1/1963 Loebel 96/190

(Continued)

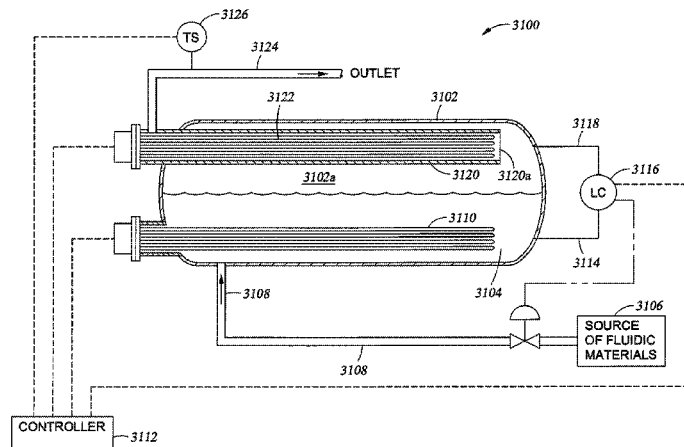
Primary Examiner — Robert Clemente

(74) *Attorney, Agent, or Firm* — Bracewell & Giuliani LLP

(57) **ABSTRACT**

A method of heating fluids that includes heating liquids
within a lower portion of a vessel, using first immersion
heaters and heating a gas within an upper portion of the vessel
using second immersion heaters. Liquid levels in the lower
portion of the vessel are controlled. Heating the gas includes
heating gas within the upper portion of the common vessel
within another vessel positioned within the upper portion of
the common vessel.

18 Claims, 34 Drawing Sheets



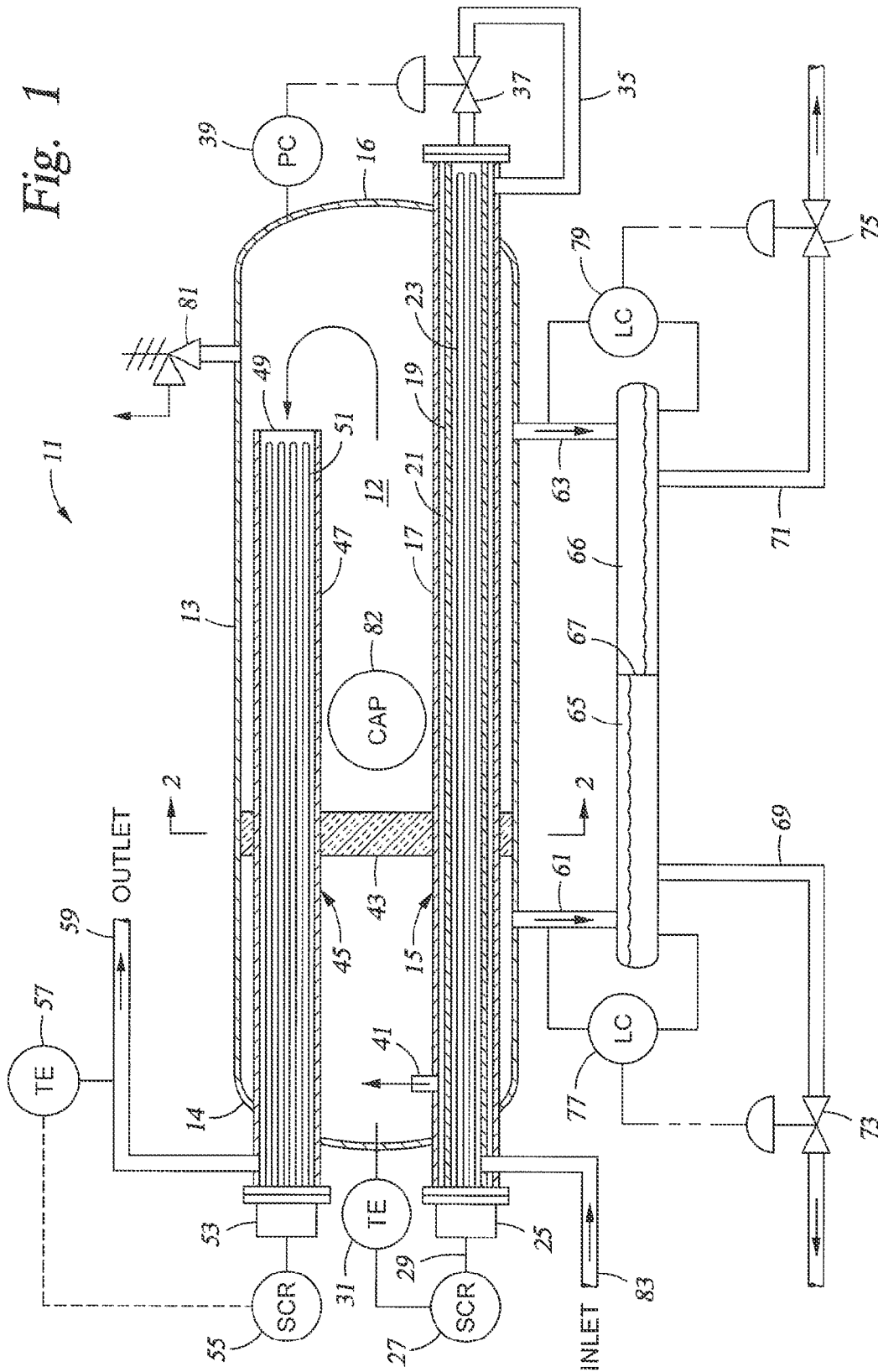
(56)

References Cited

U.S. PATENT DOCUMENTS

3,248,305	A *	4/1966	Williamson	202/180	6,592,641	B2	7/2003	Alvin et al.
3,712,073	A *	1/1973	Arenson	62/50.2	6,816,669	B2	11/2004	Zimmer et al.
3,726,713	A	4/1973	Hawk et al.		6,972,841	B2	12/2005	Krempl et al.
3,871,734	A	3/1975	Murtland		6,994,589	B2	2/2006	Schliese
4,163,371	A	8/1979	Groninger		7,145,114	B2	12/2006	Wakamatu et al.
4,781,607	A	11/1988	Rumbaugh		7,164,851	B2	1/2007	Sturm et al.
4,877,489	A *	10/1989	Lloyd	202/181	7,204,724	B2	4/2007	Holtze
4,895,528	A	1/1990	Choiniere et al.		7,318,735	B2	1/2008	Fannin et al.
5,070,940	A	12/1991	Conner et al.		7,372,007	B1	5/2008	McClanahan et al.
5,216,743	A	6/1993	Seitz		7,442,239	B2	10/2008	Armstrong et al.
5,396,574	A	3/1995	Base et al.		7,554,064	B1	6/2009	Fannin et al.
5,483,040	A	1/1996	Fortune		7,616,873	B1	11/2009	Seitz
5,577,925	A	11/1996	Schnatzmeyer et al.		2009/0217581	A1	9/2009	McClanahan et al.
5,590,240	A	12/1996	Rezabek		2010/0050518	A1	3/2010	McClanahan et al.
5,923,819	A *	7/1999	Ross et al.	392/441	2010/0058761	A1	3/2010	McClanahan et al.
6,145,597	A	11/2000	Kobylnski		2010/0059121	A1	3/2010	McClanahan et al.
6,364,933	B1	4/2002	Heath		2010/0061710	A1	3/2010	McClanahan et al.
6,551,379	B2	4/2003	Heath		2010/0170210	A1	7/2010	McClanahan et al.
					2011/0116777	A1	5/2011	Tiras
					2011/0139765	A1	6/2011	McClanahan et al.
					2011/0168691	A1	7/2011	McClanahan et al.

* cited by examiner



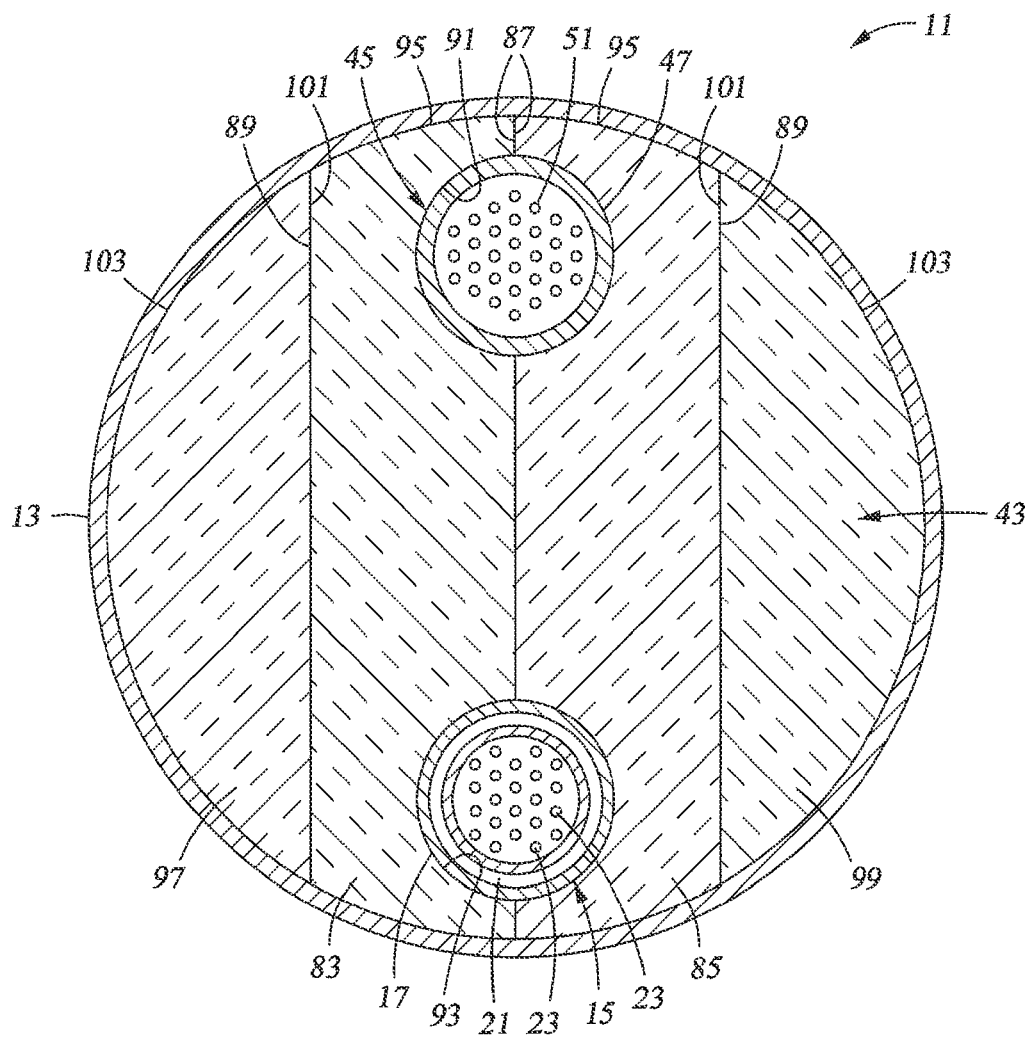


Fig. 2

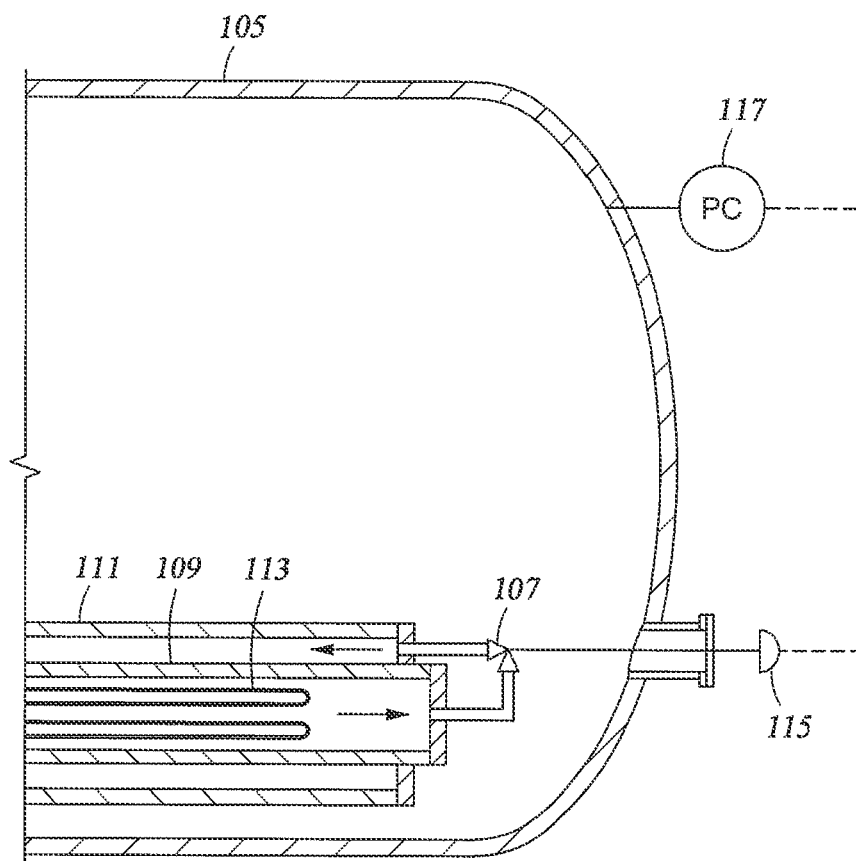
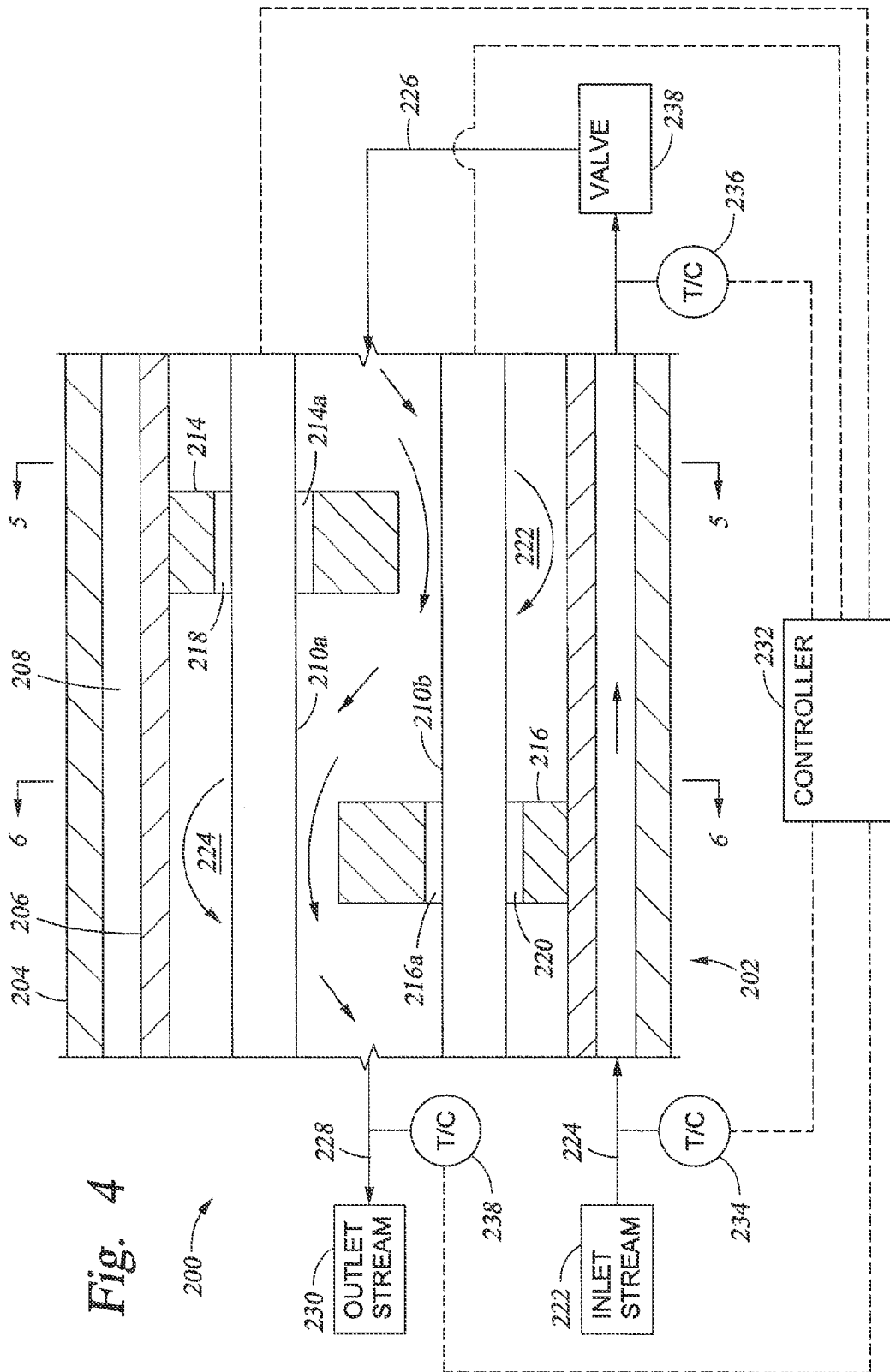


Fig. 3



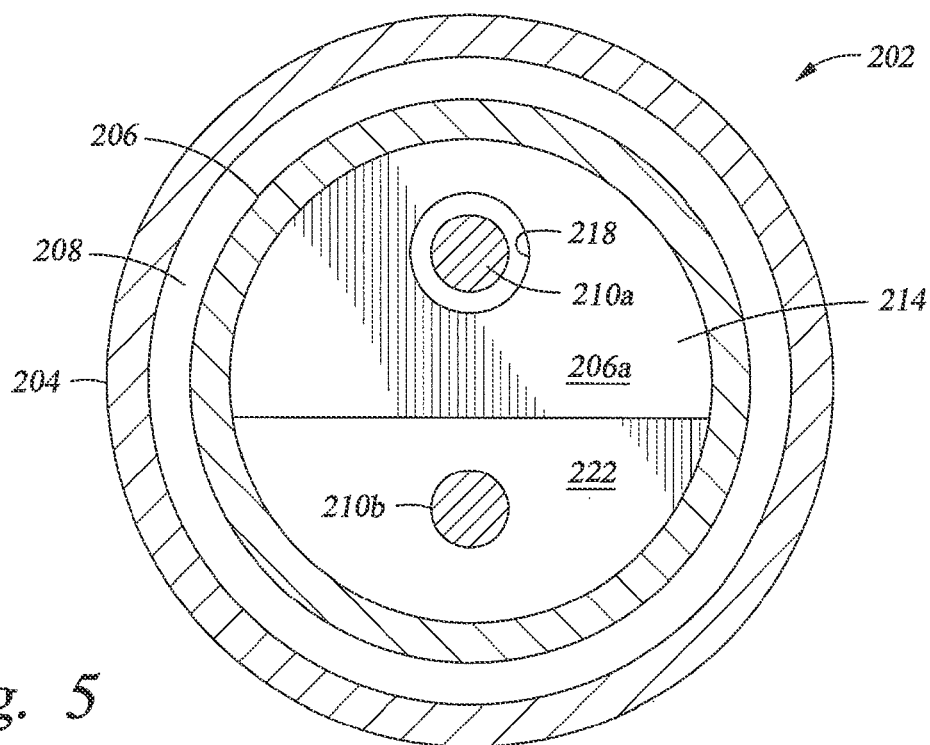


Fig. 5

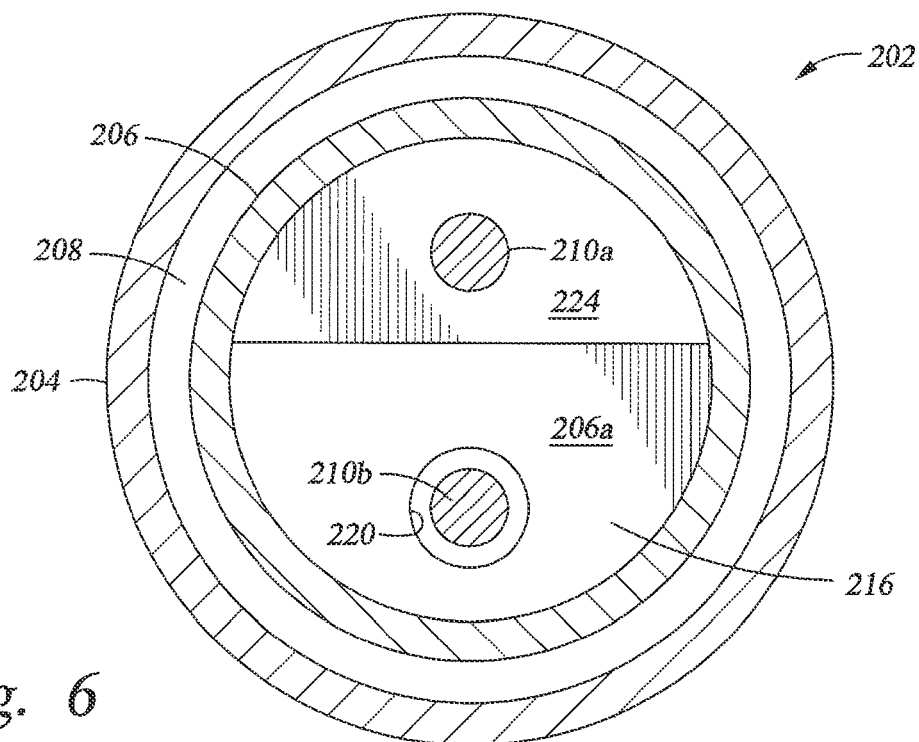


Fig. 6

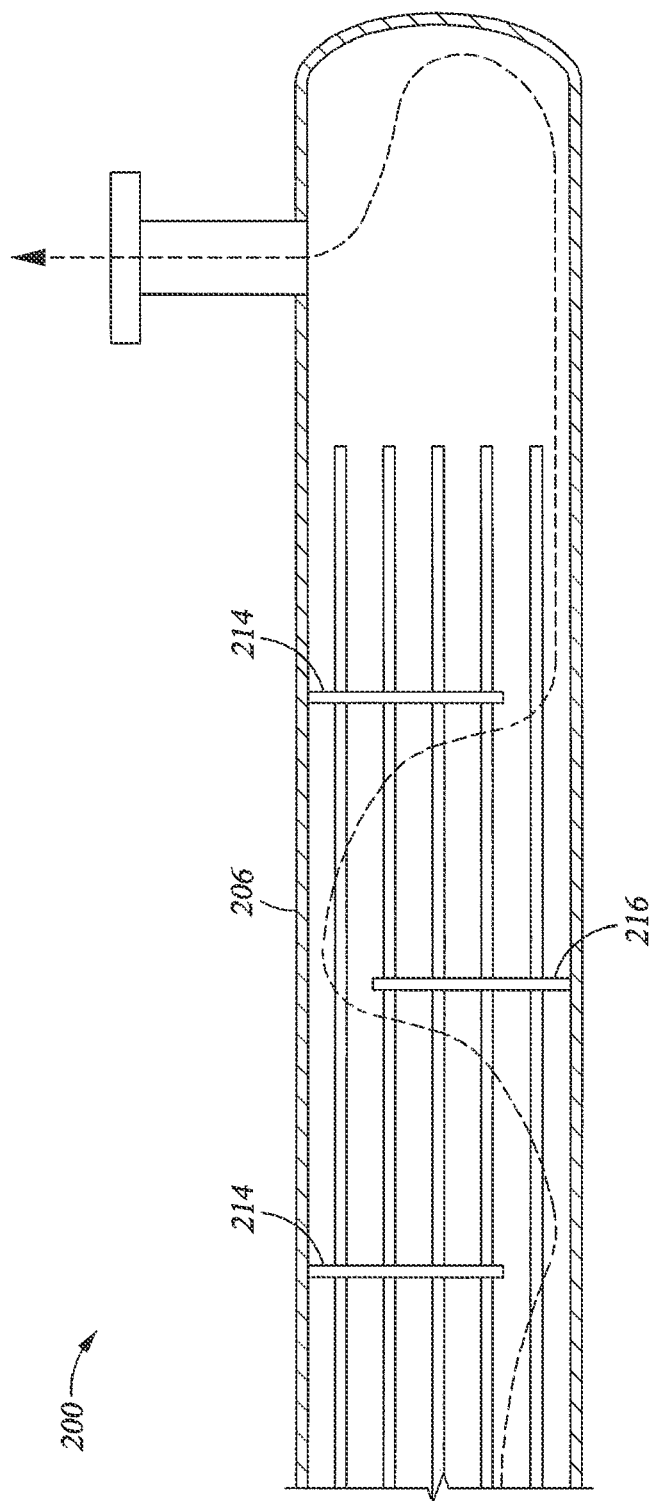


Fig. 7

Fig. 8

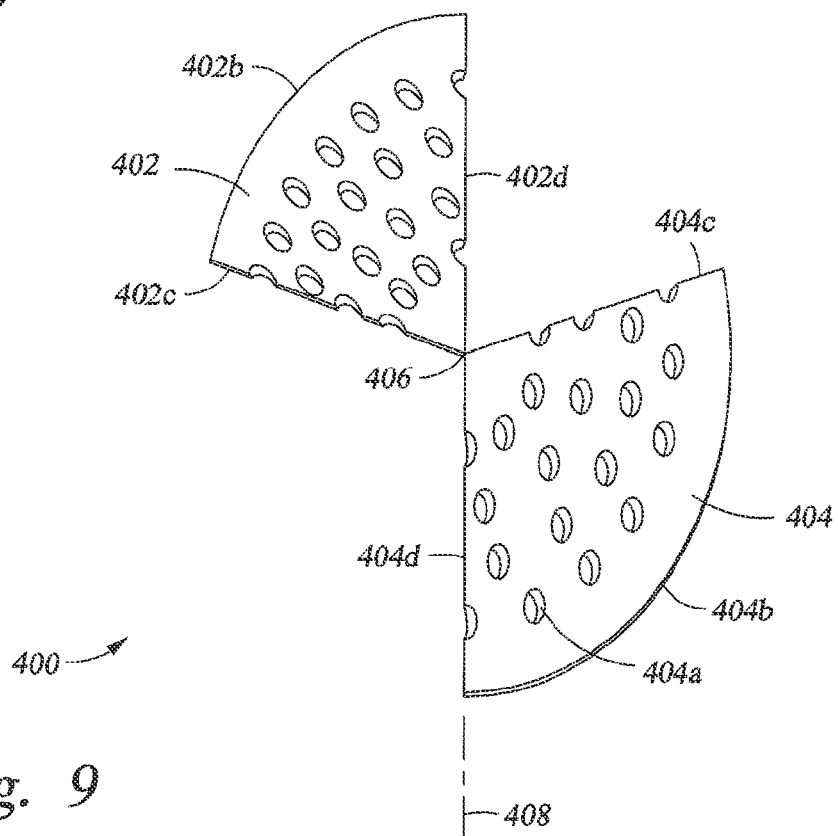
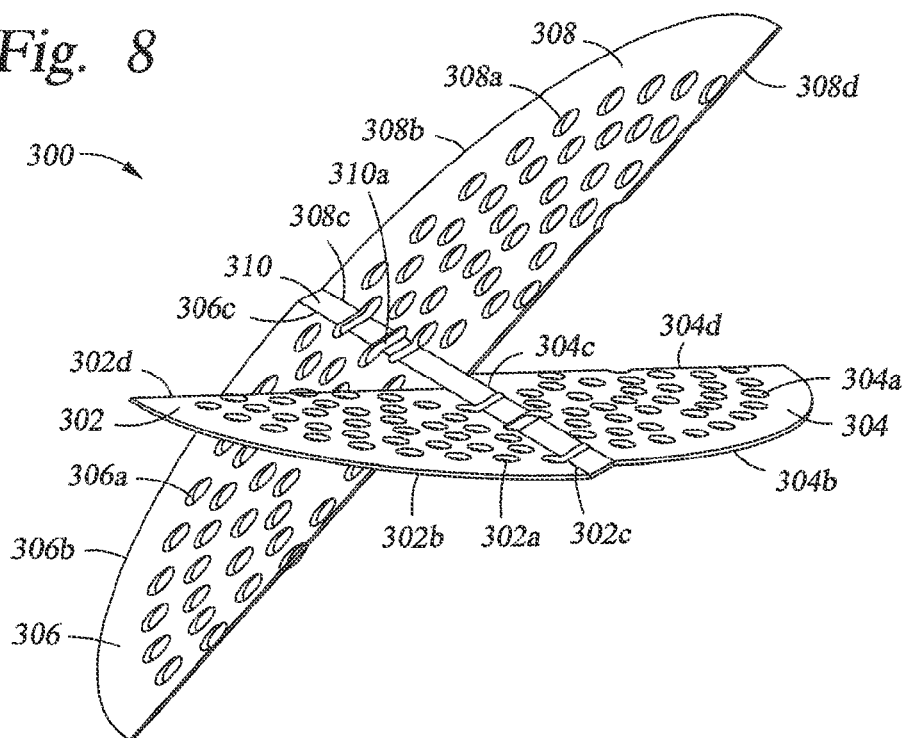
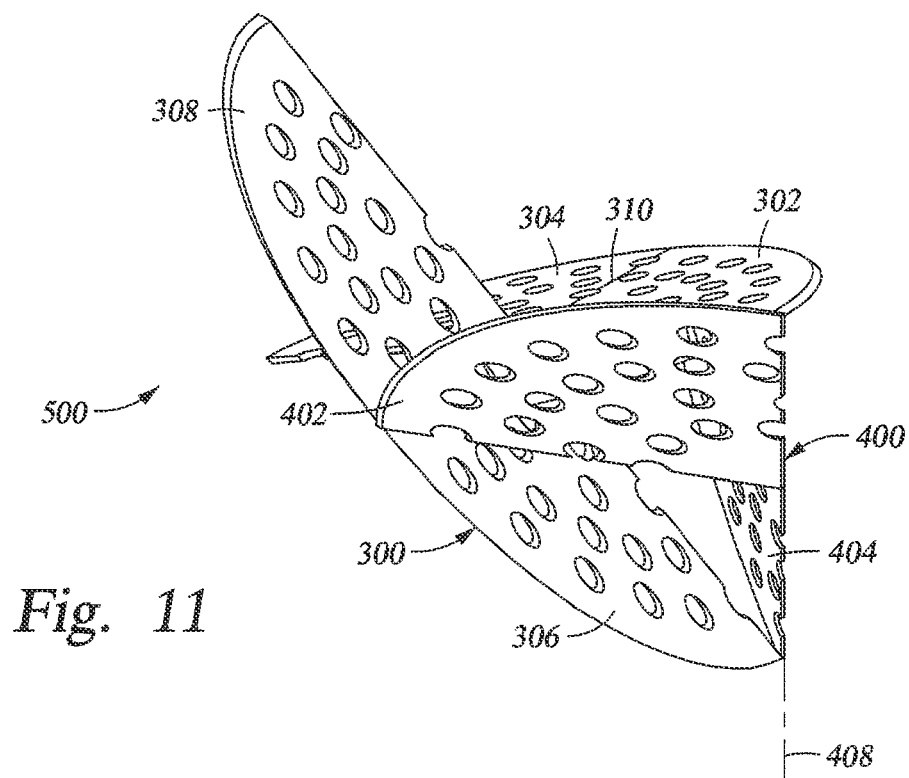
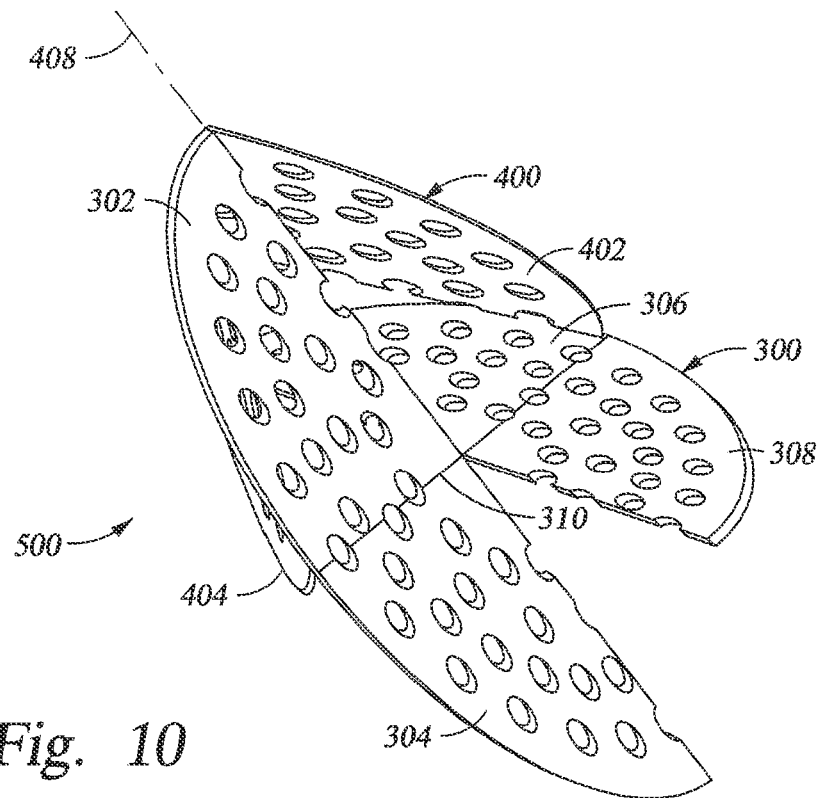


Fig. 9



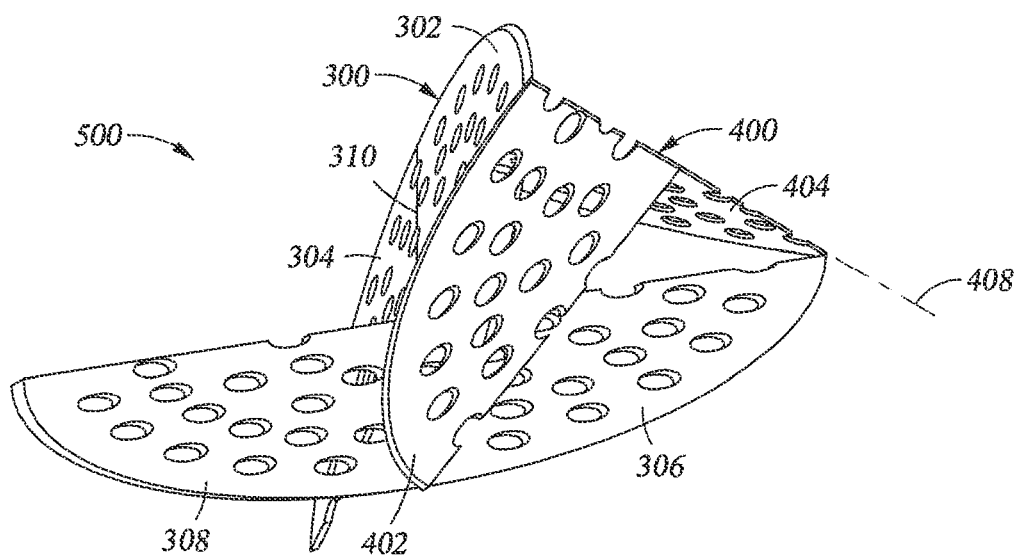


Fig. 12

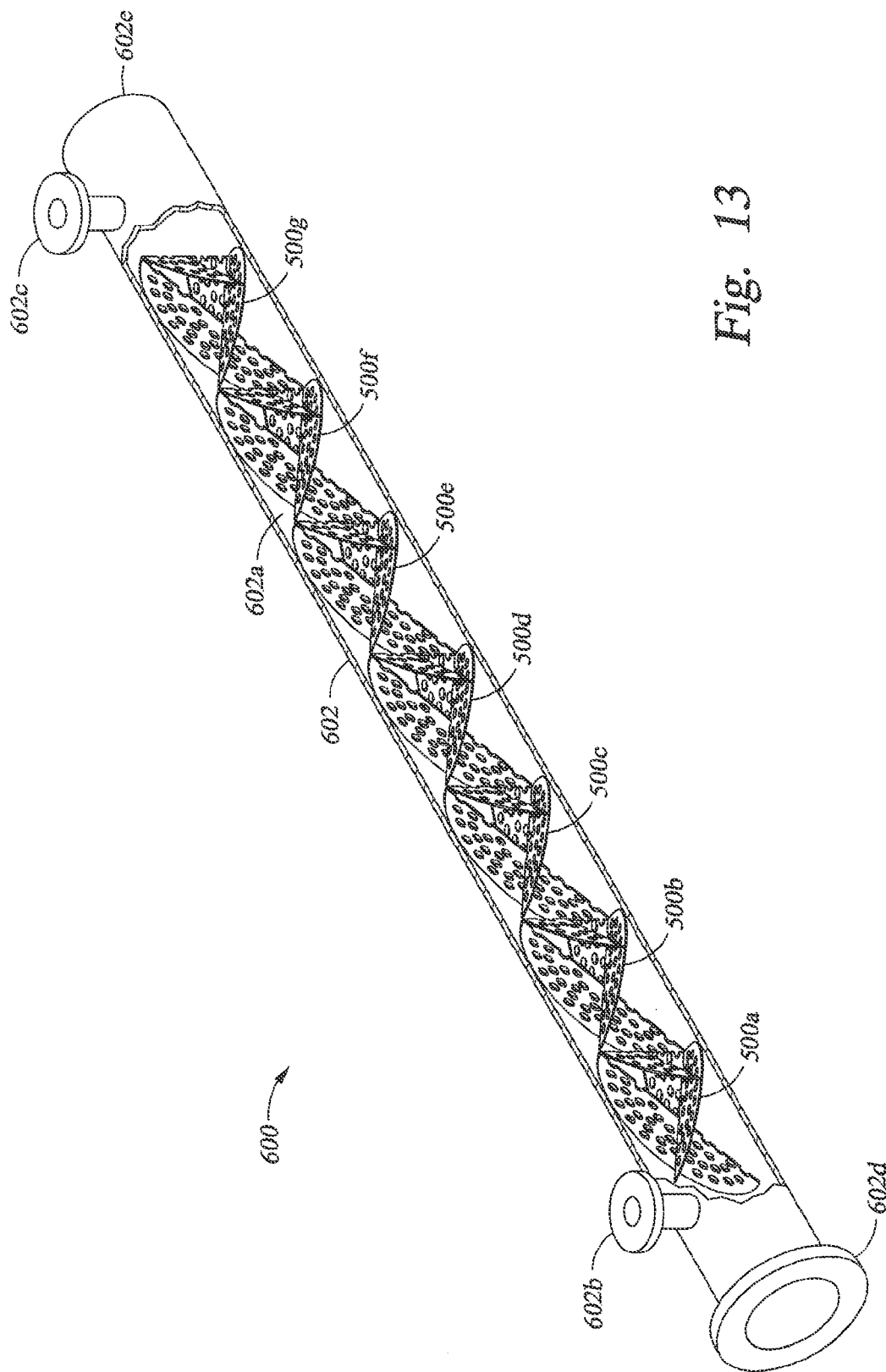


Fig. 13

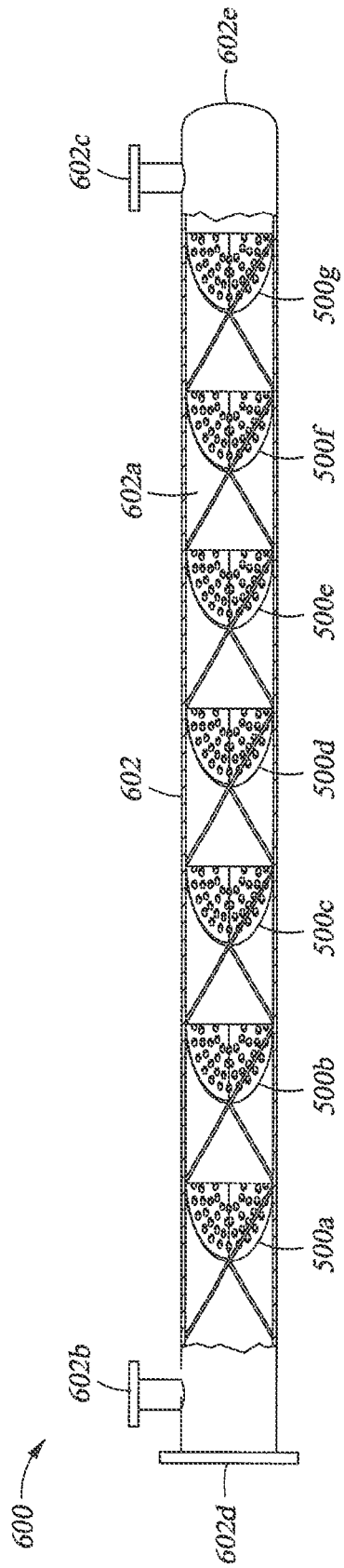


Fig. 14

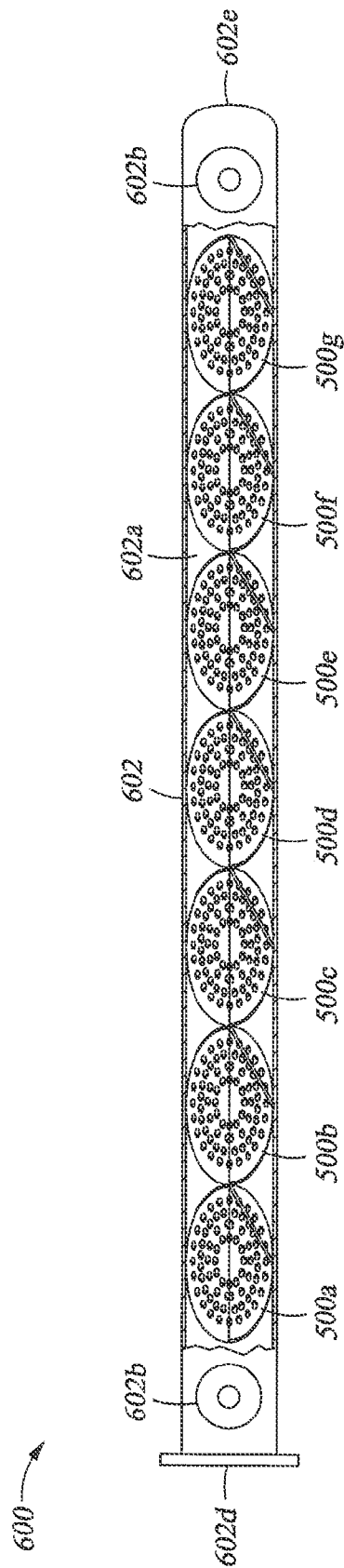


Fig. 15

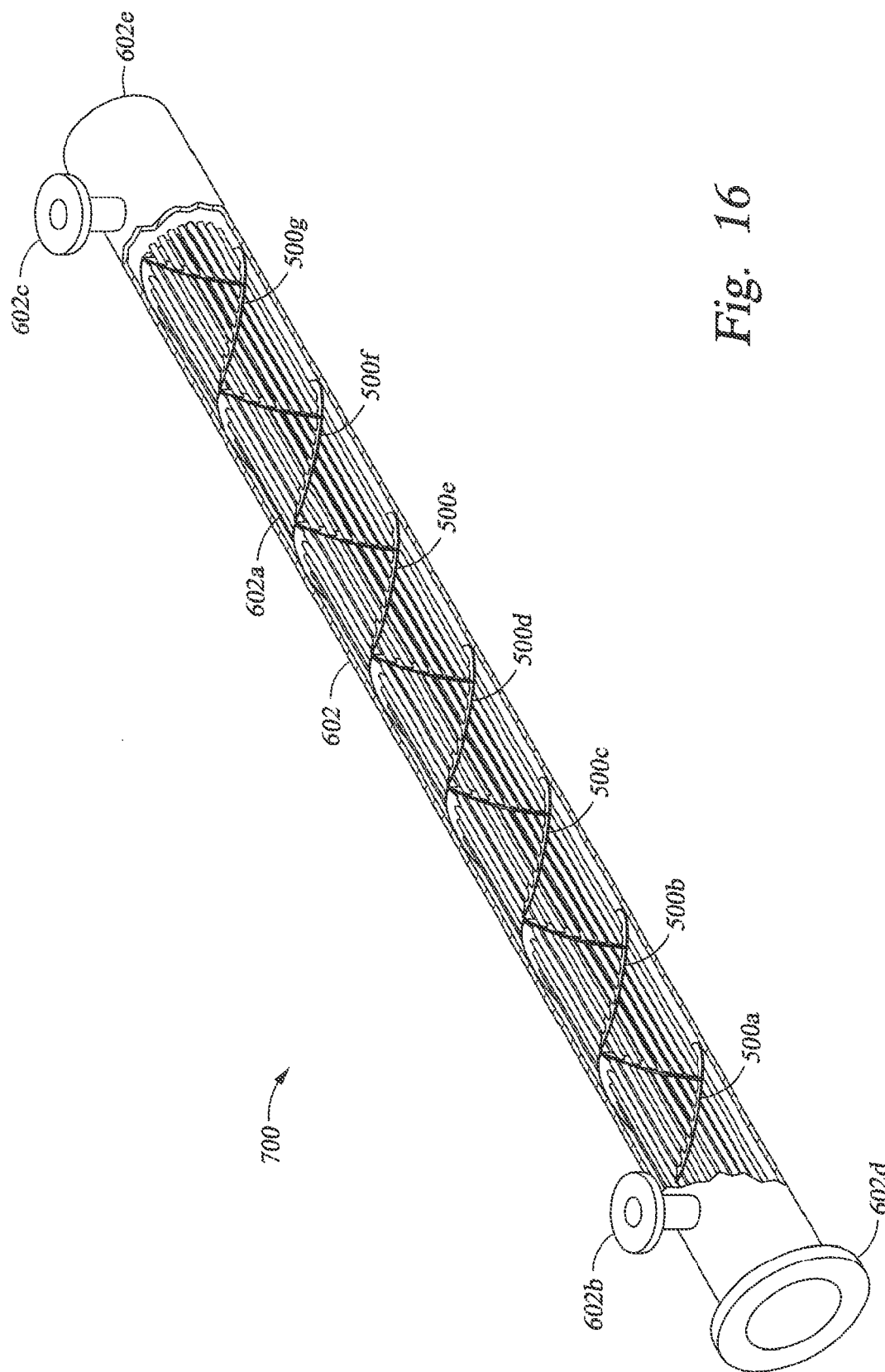


Fig. 16

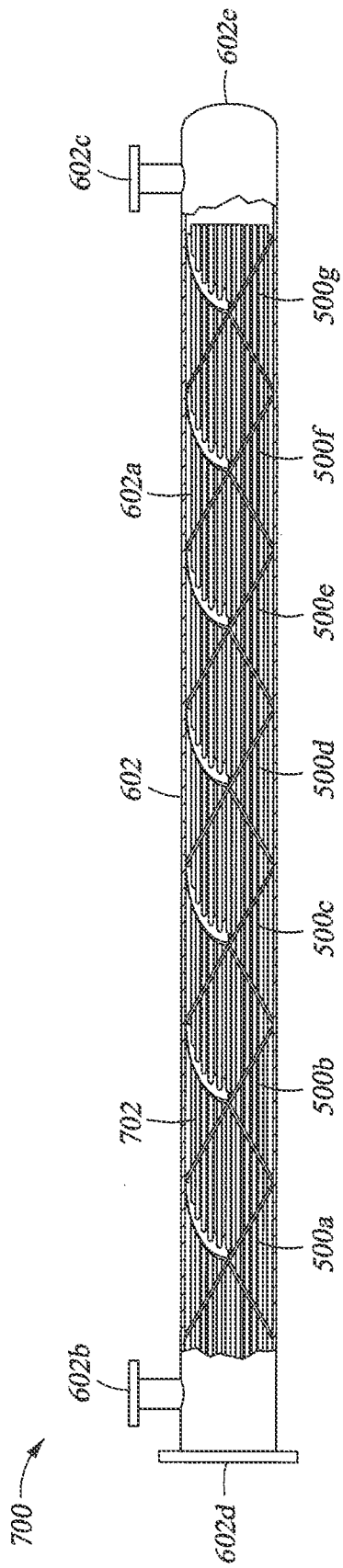


Fig. 17

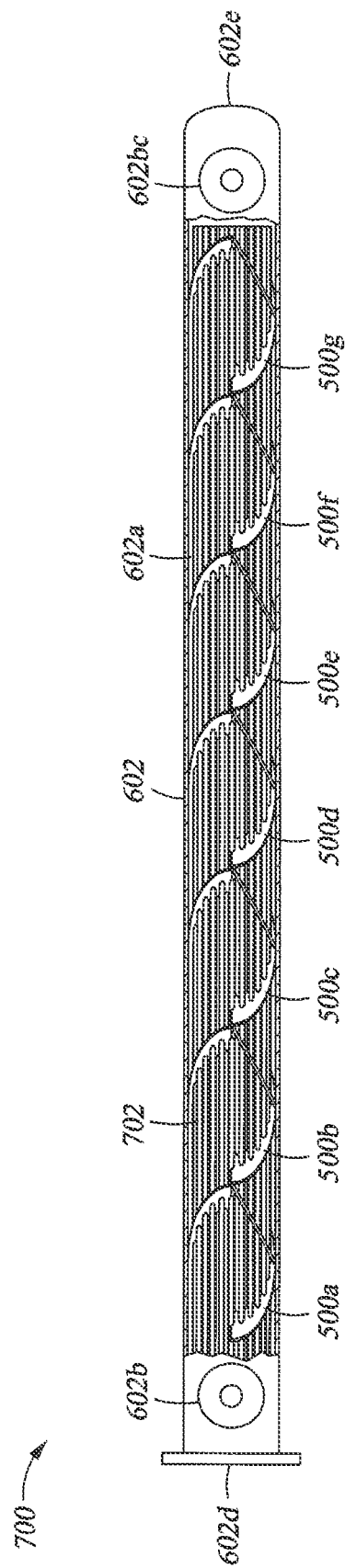


Fig. 18

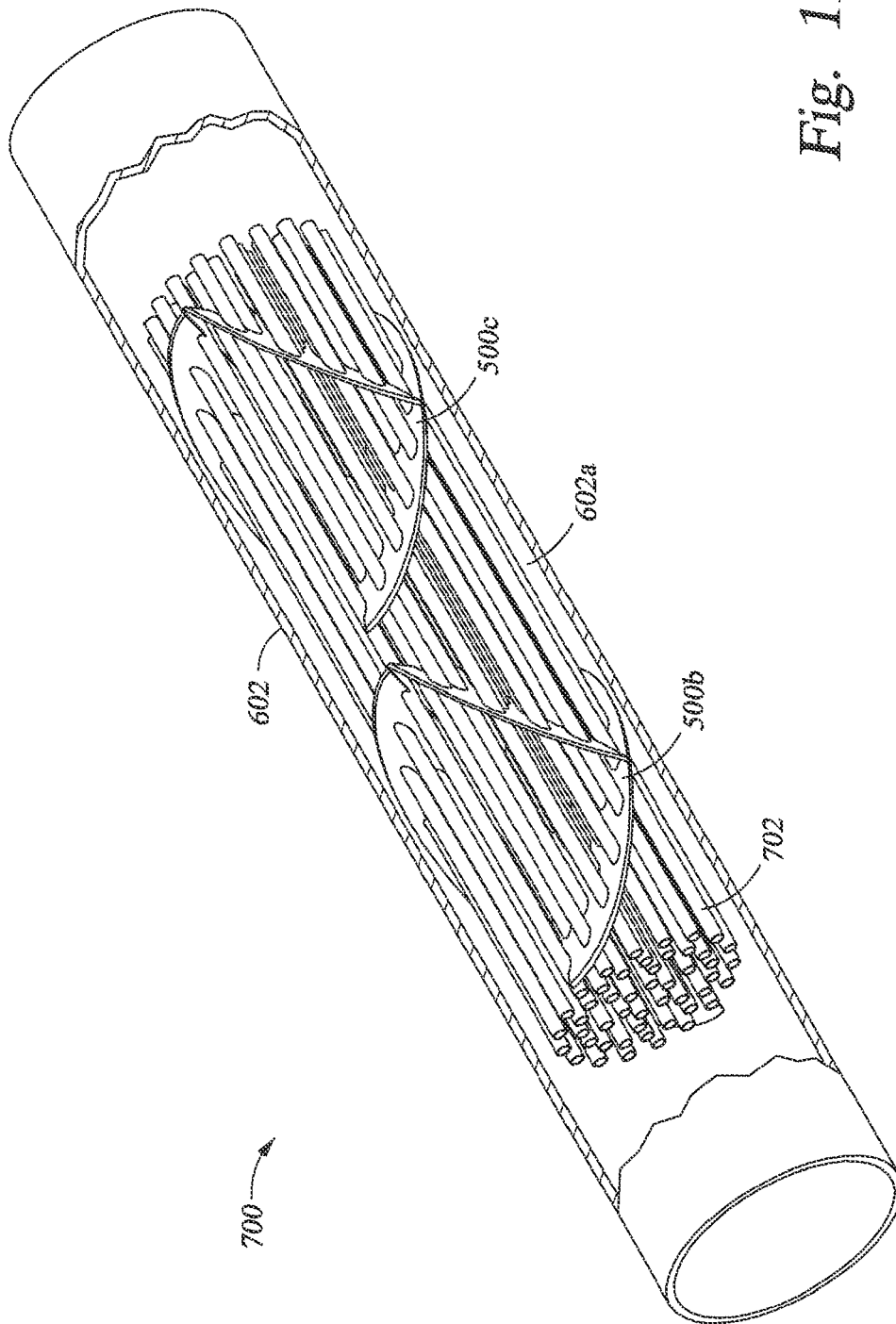


Fig. 19

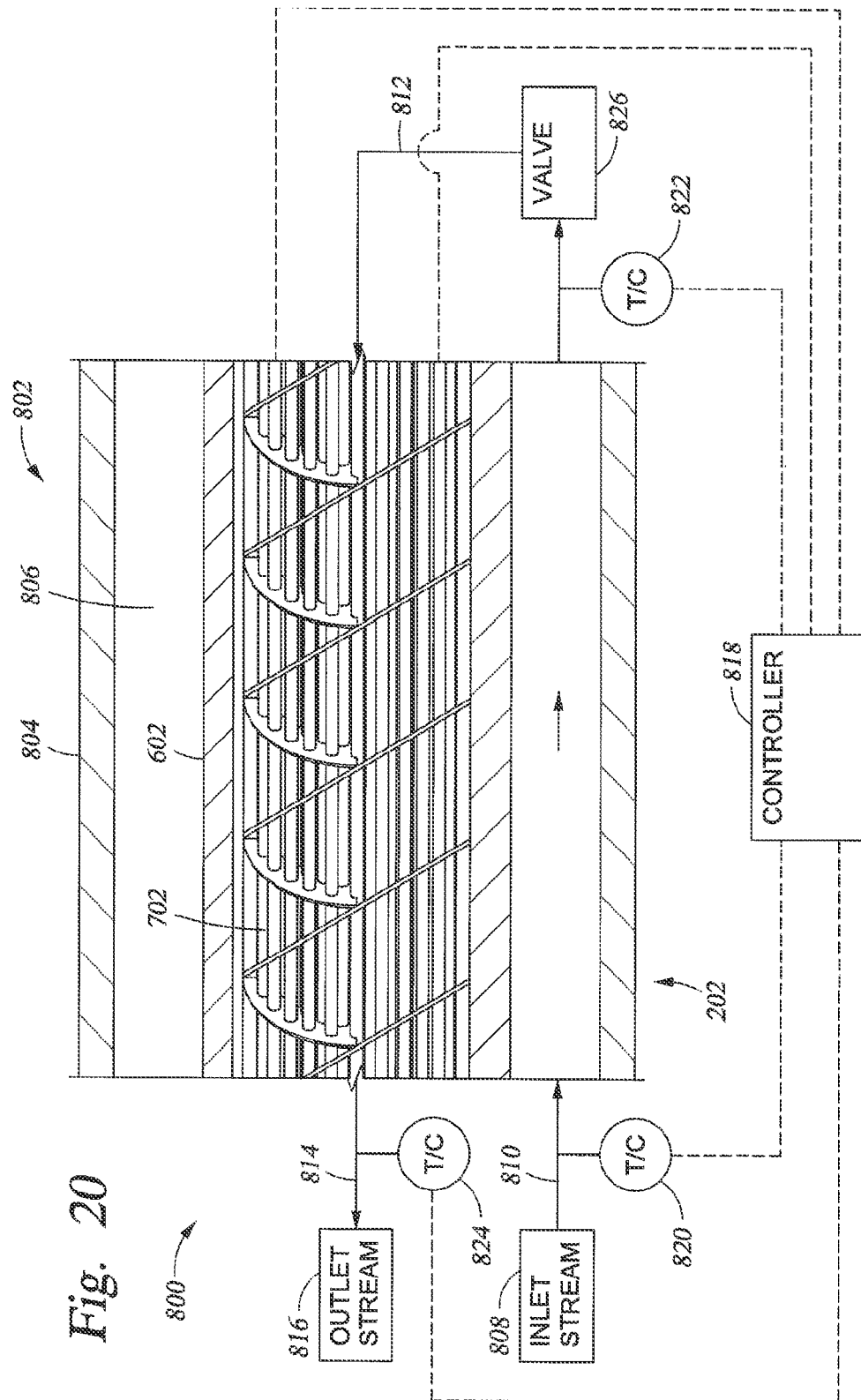
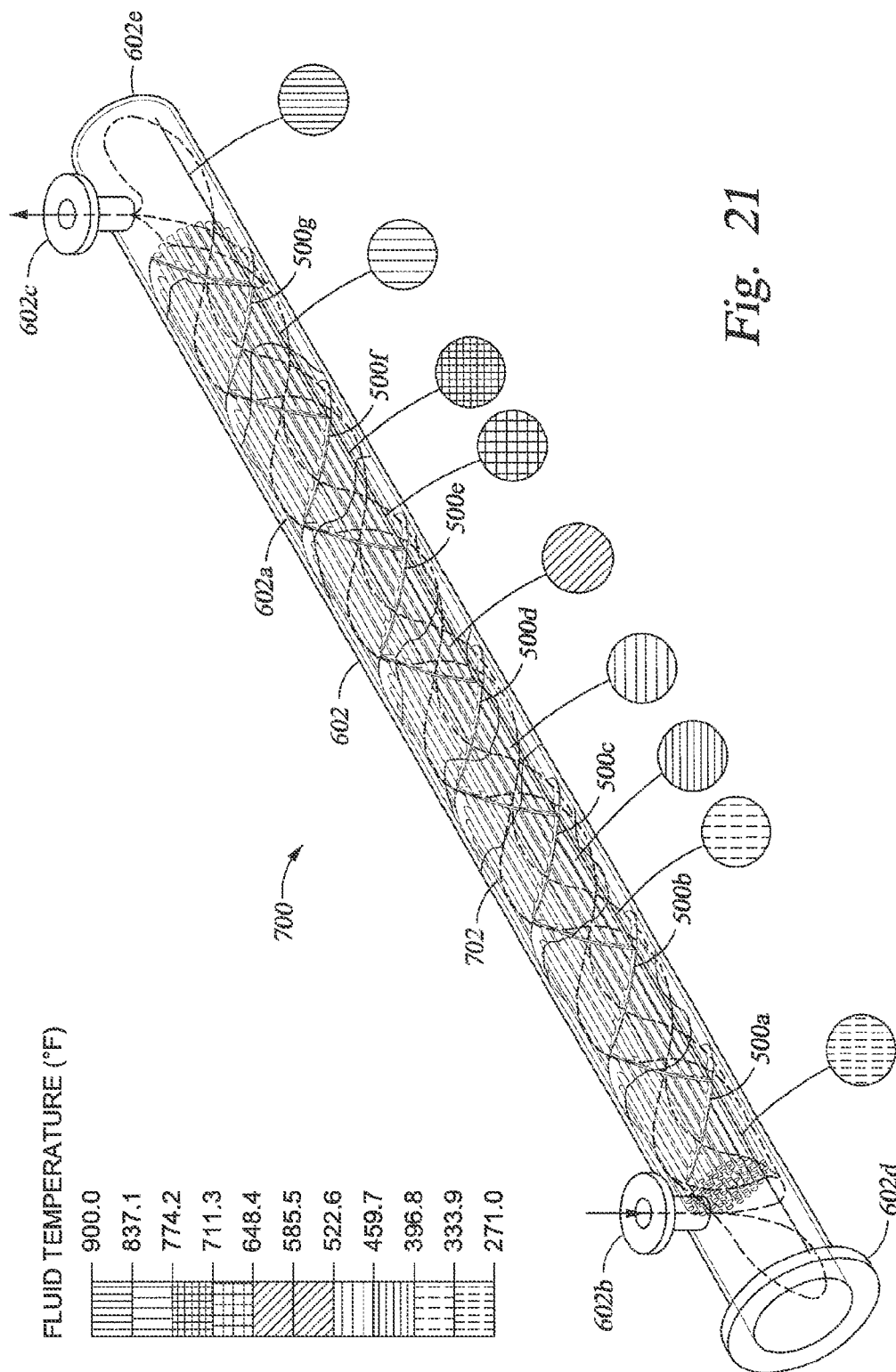
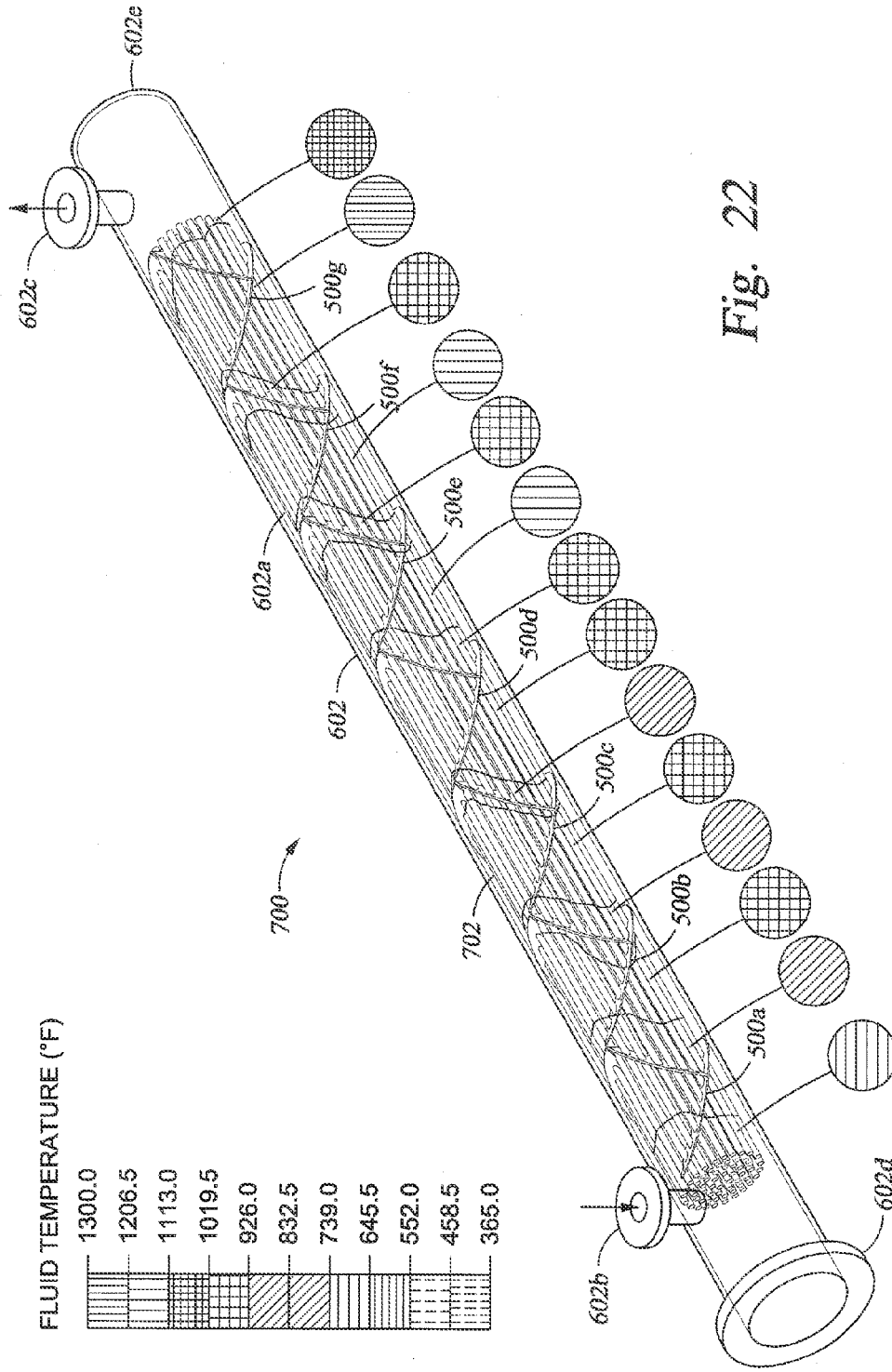


Fig. 20





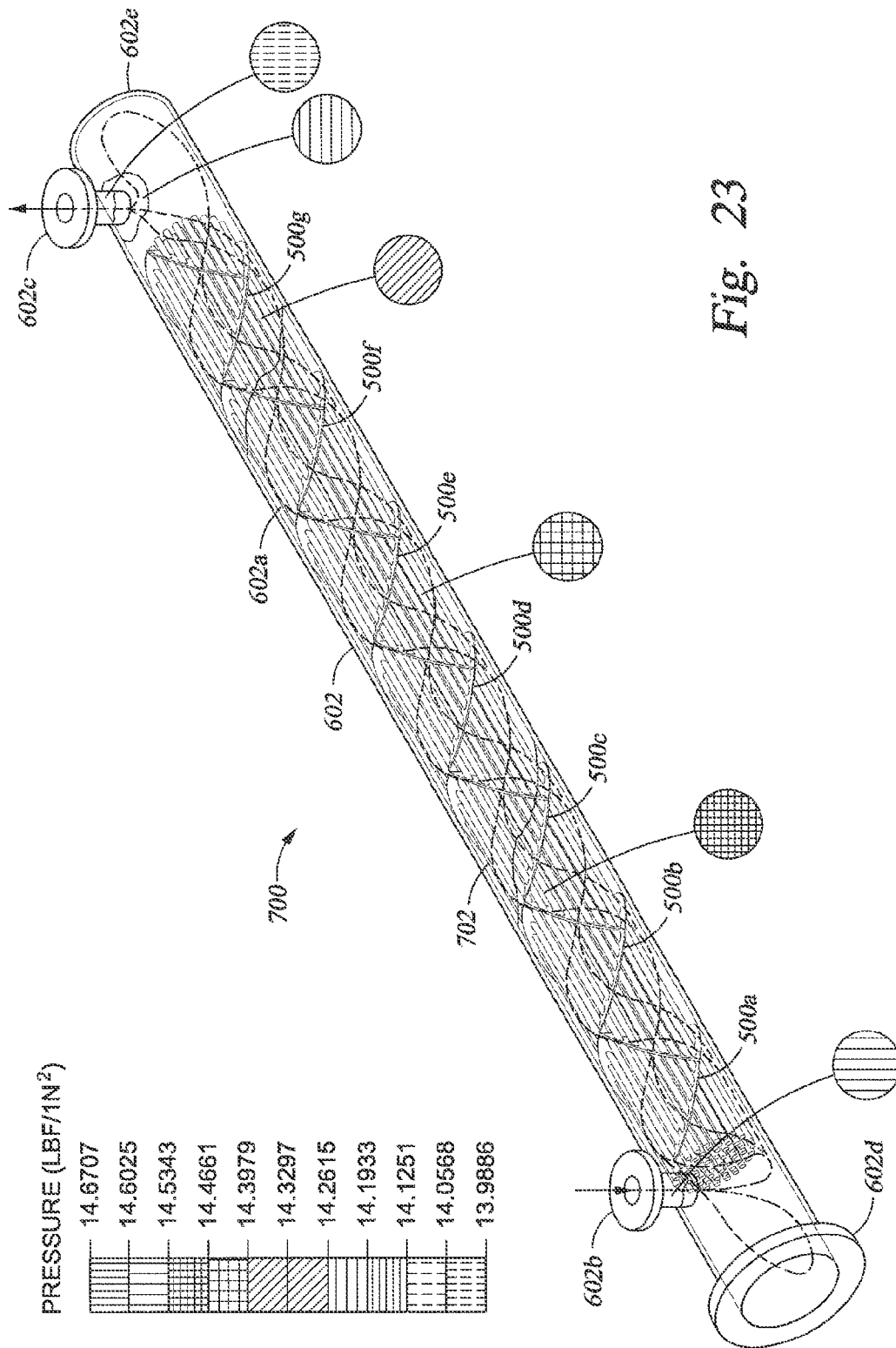


Fig. 23

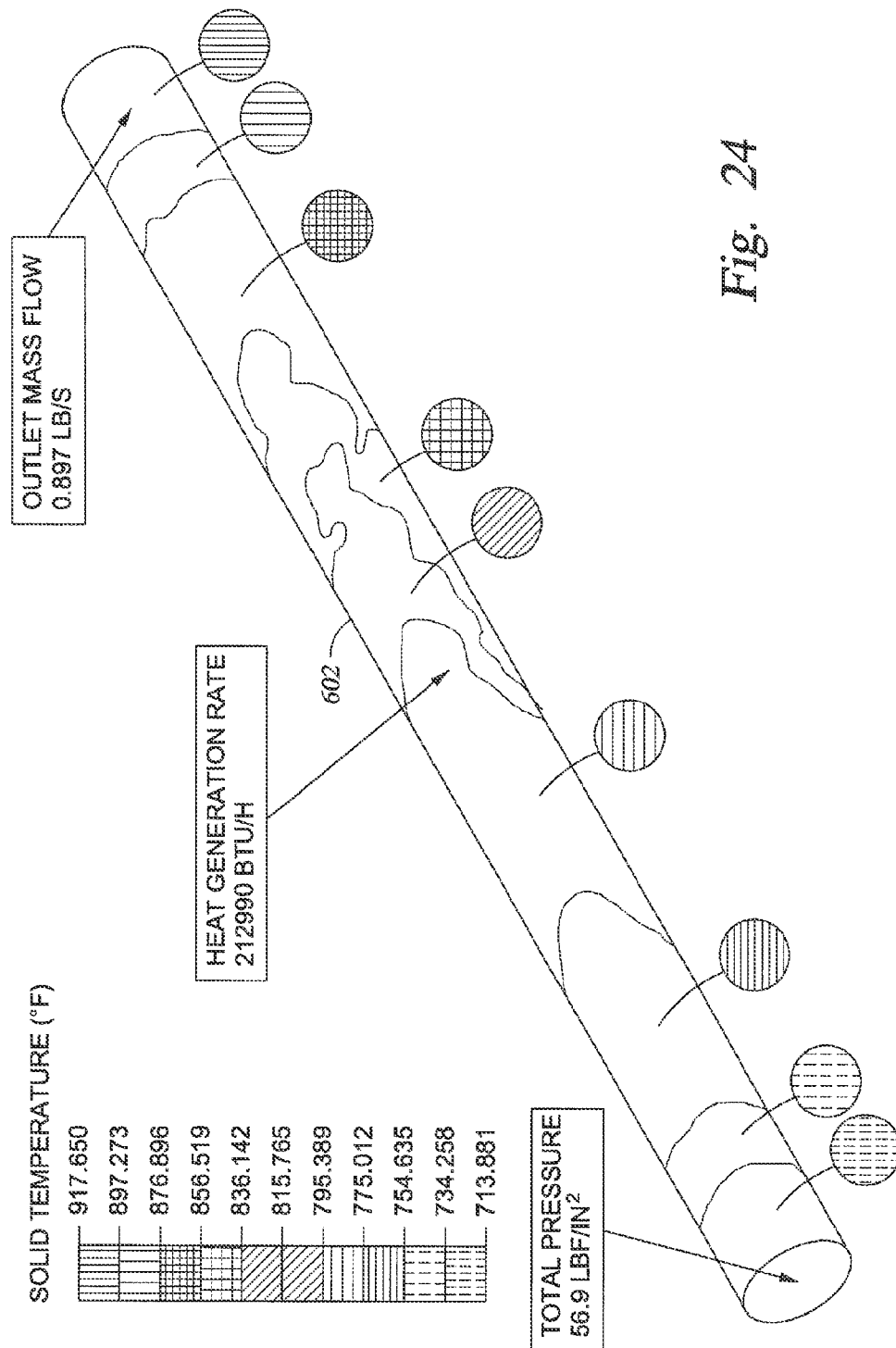


Fig. 24

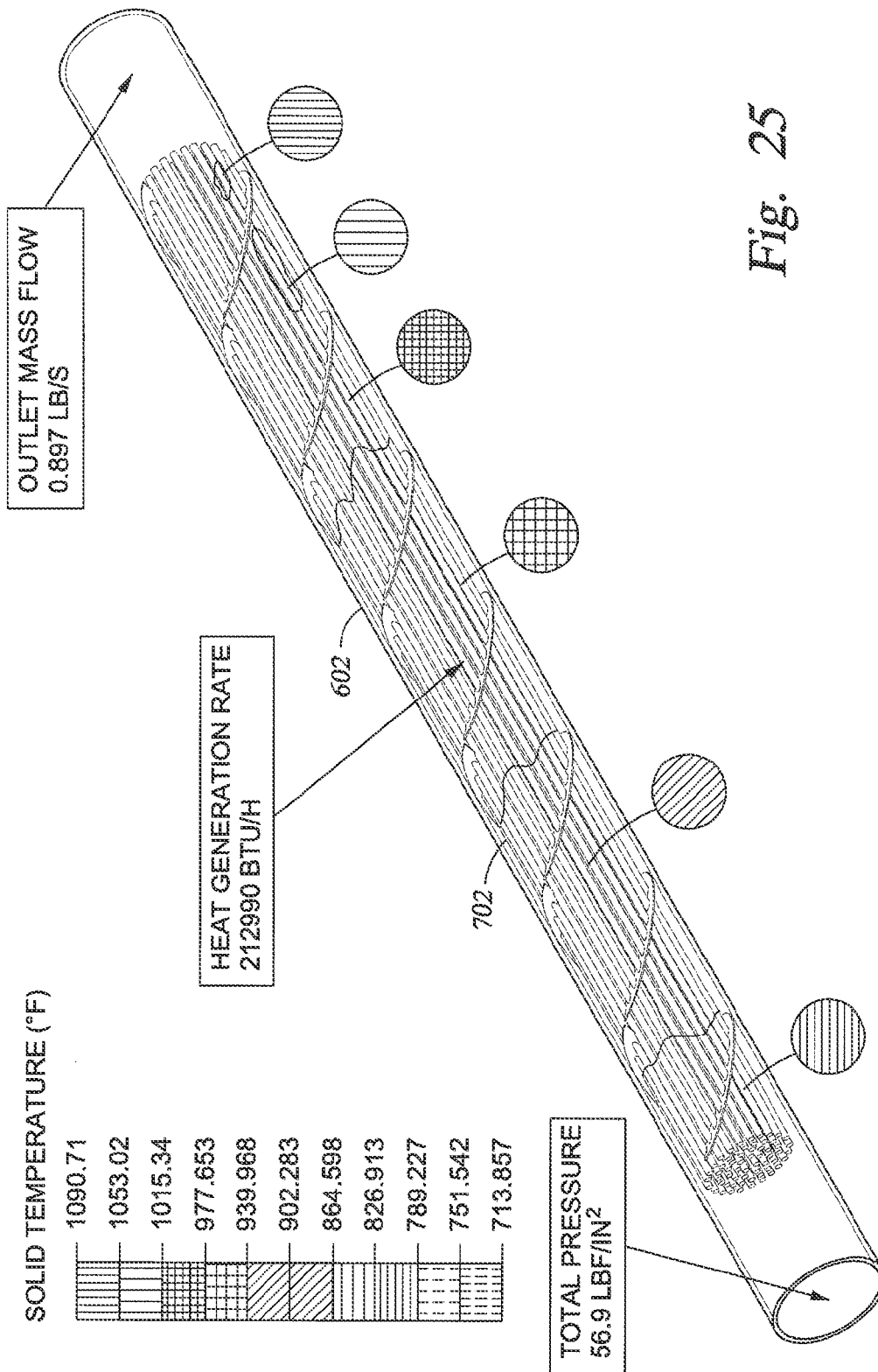


Fig. 25

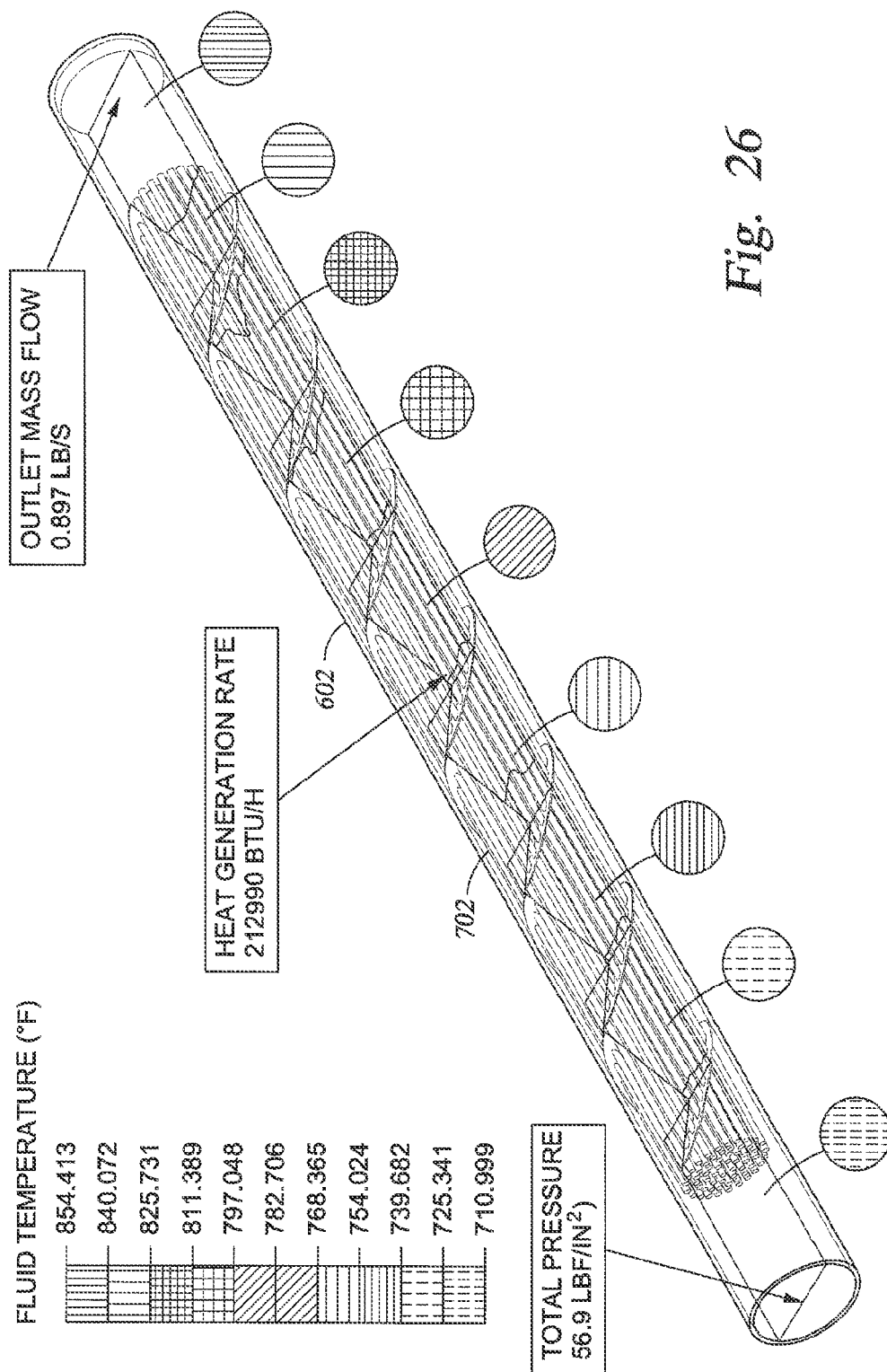
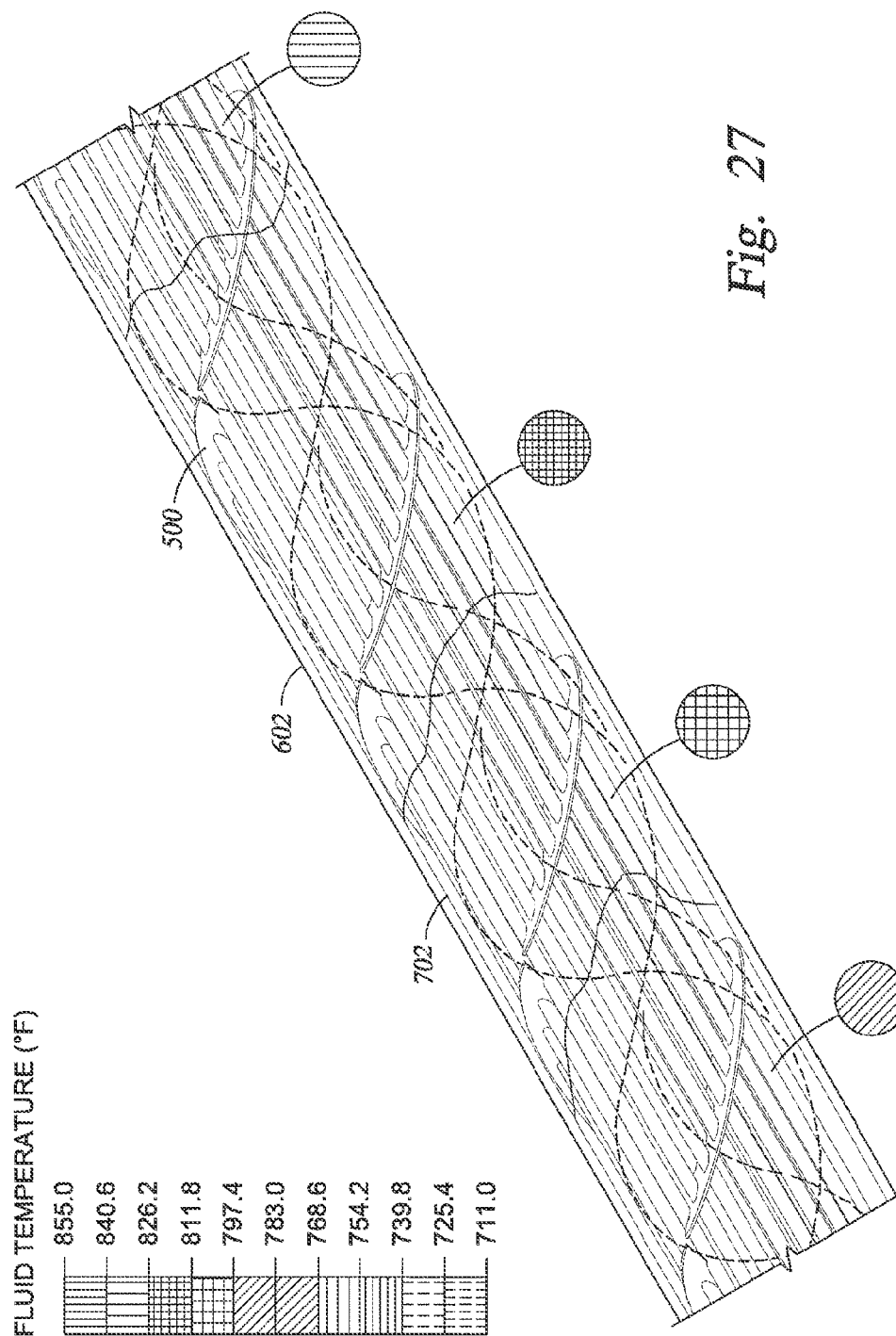
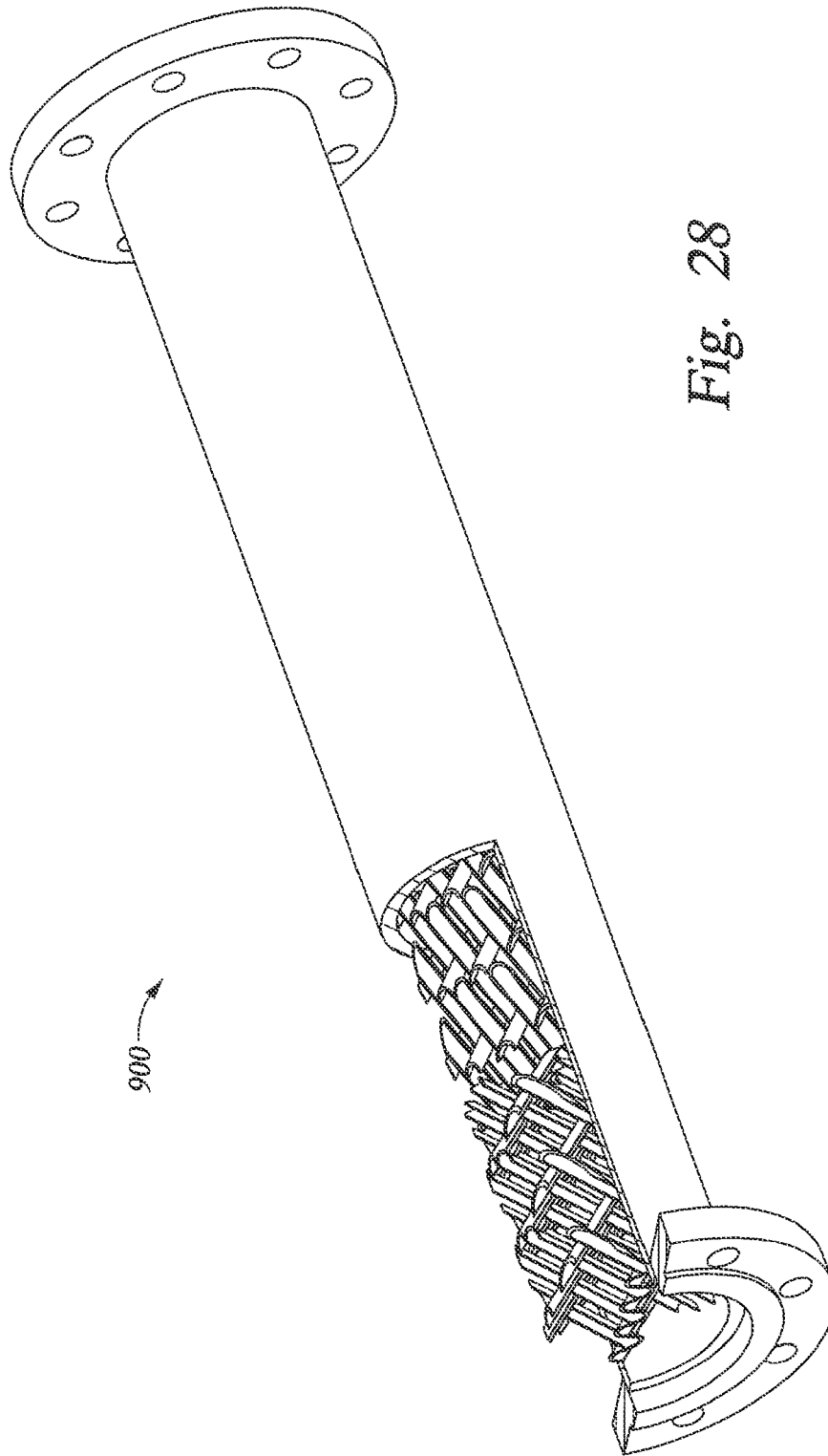
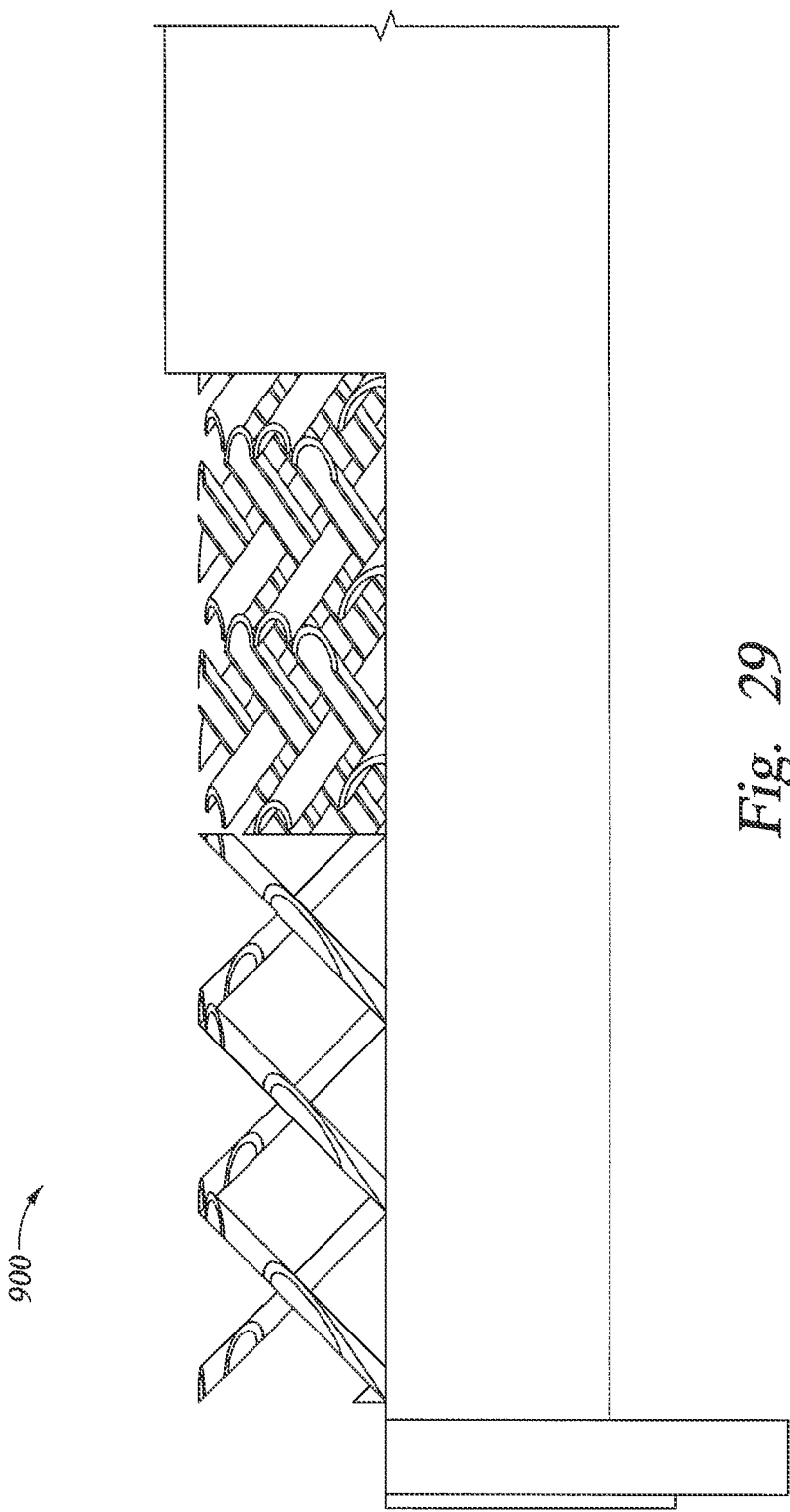
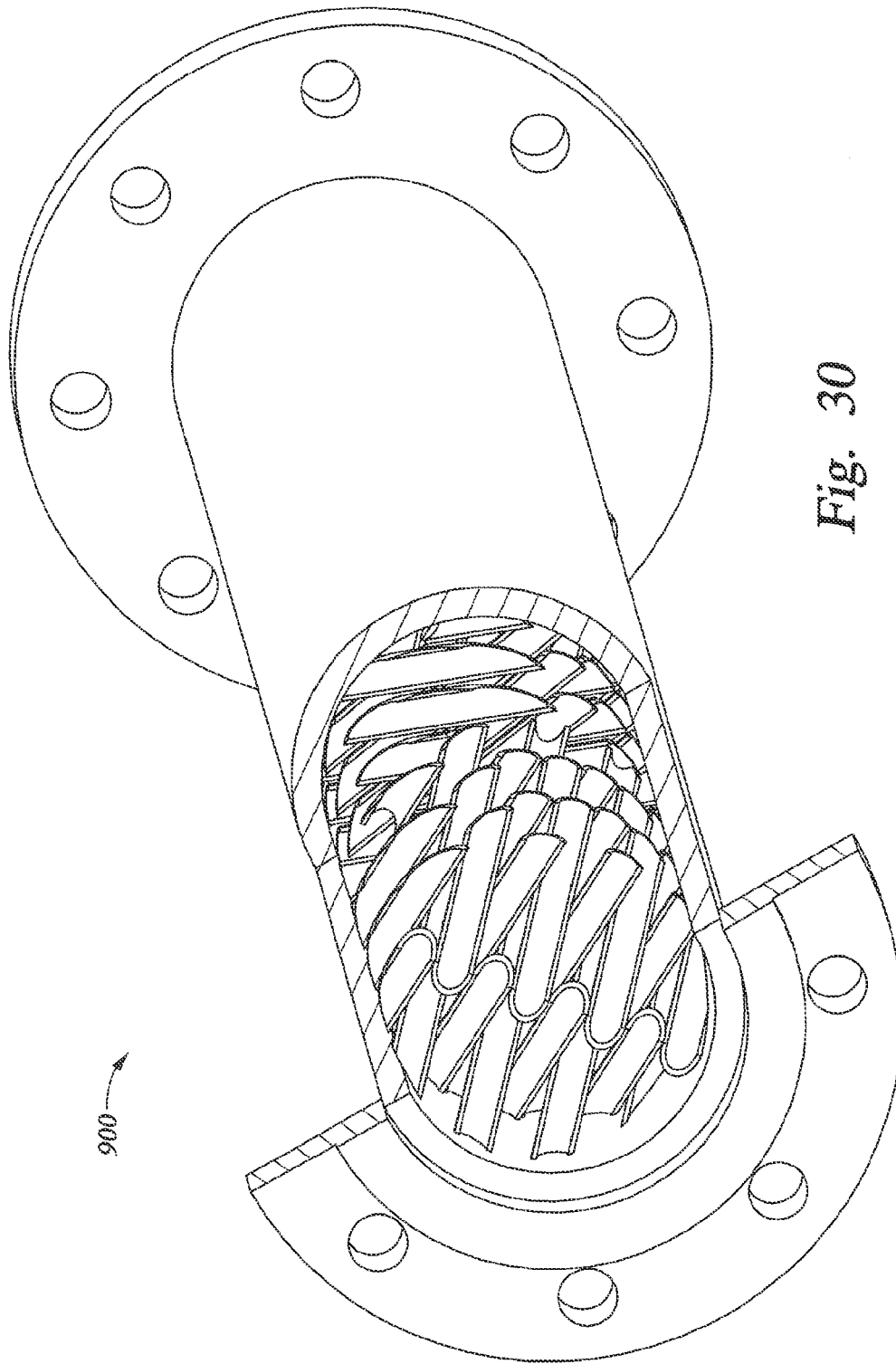


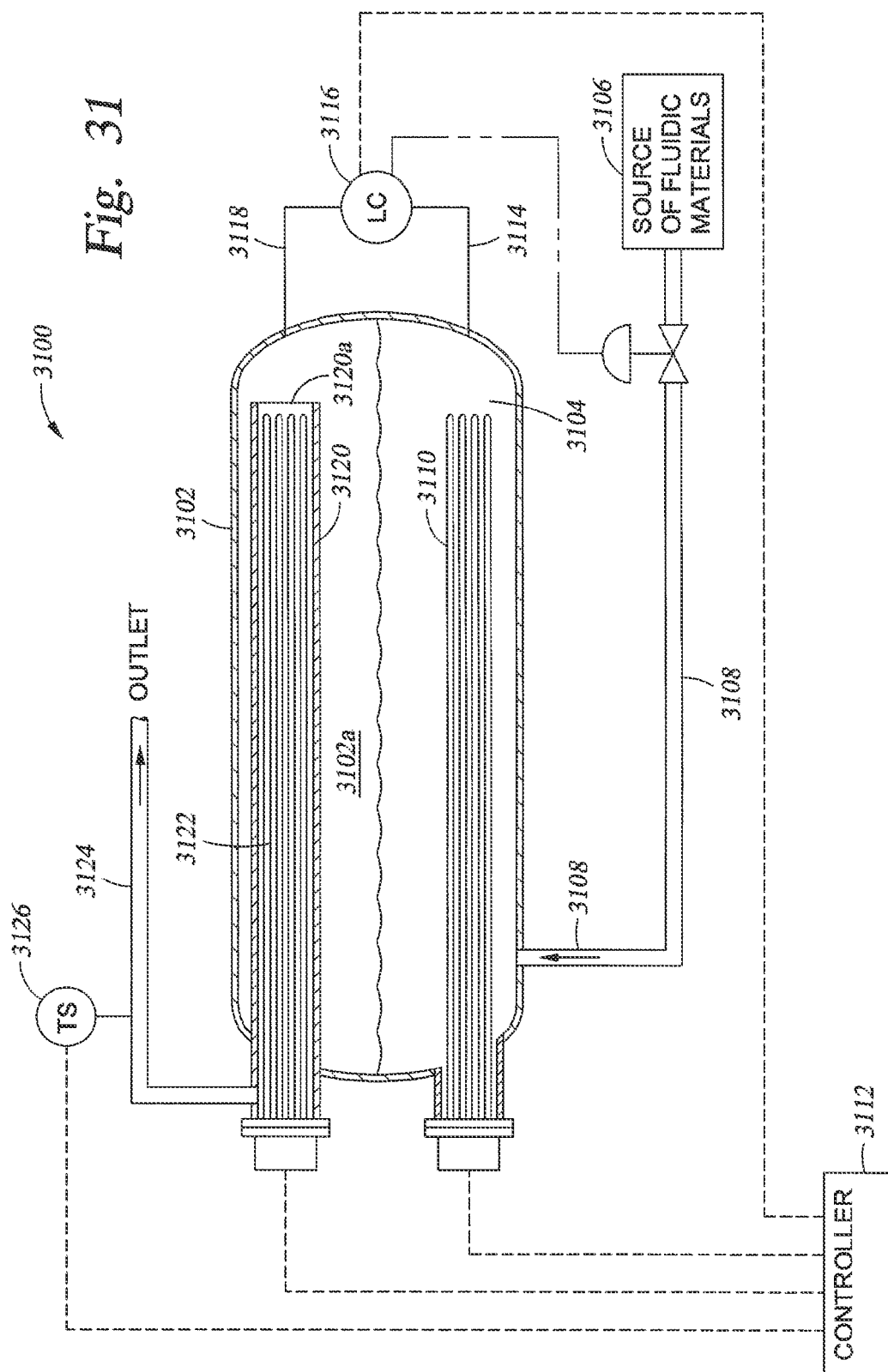
Fig. 26

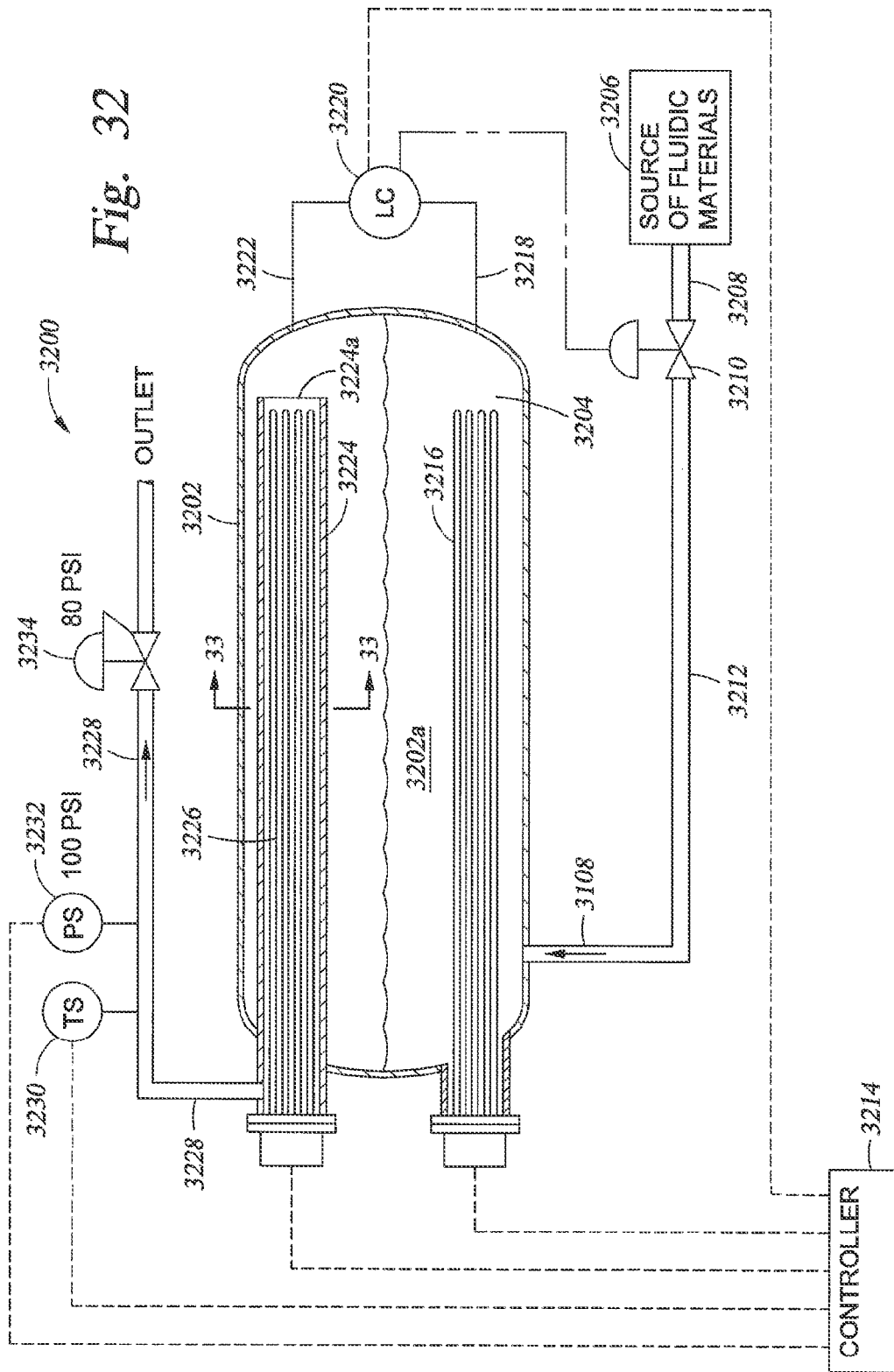


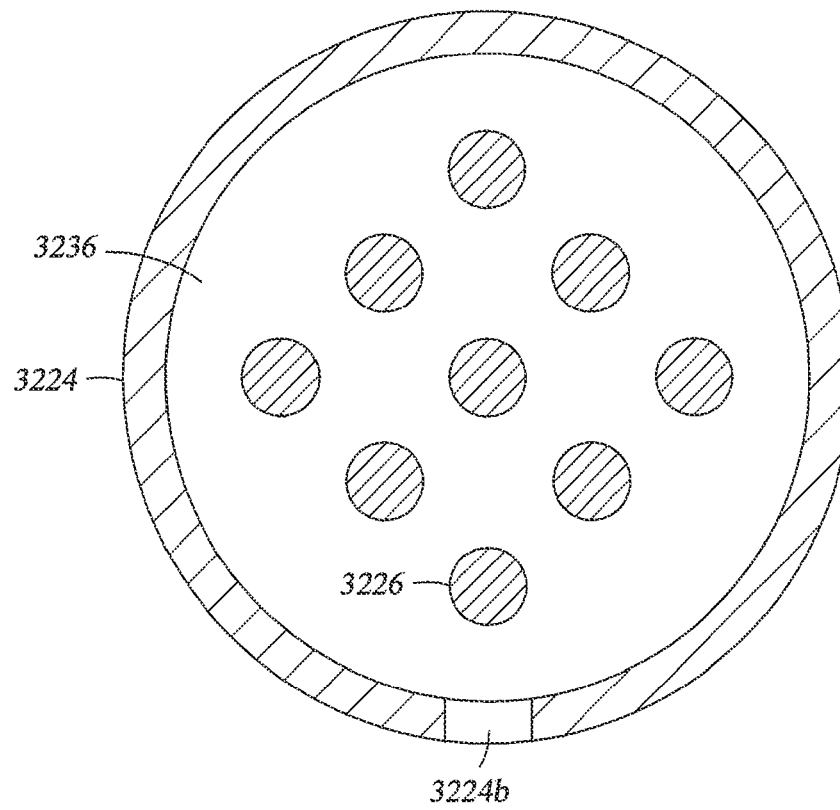










*Fig. 33*

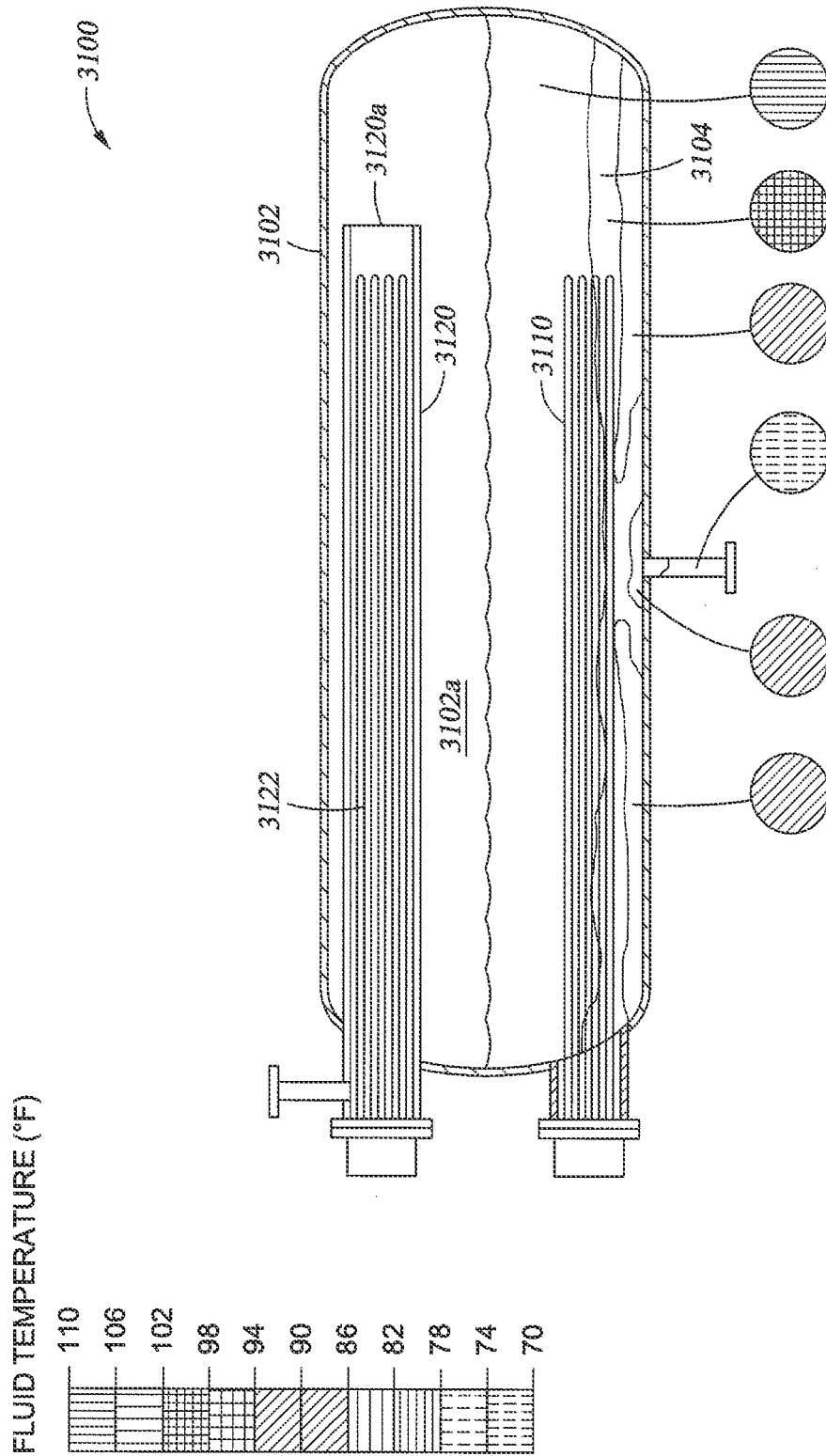


Fig. 34

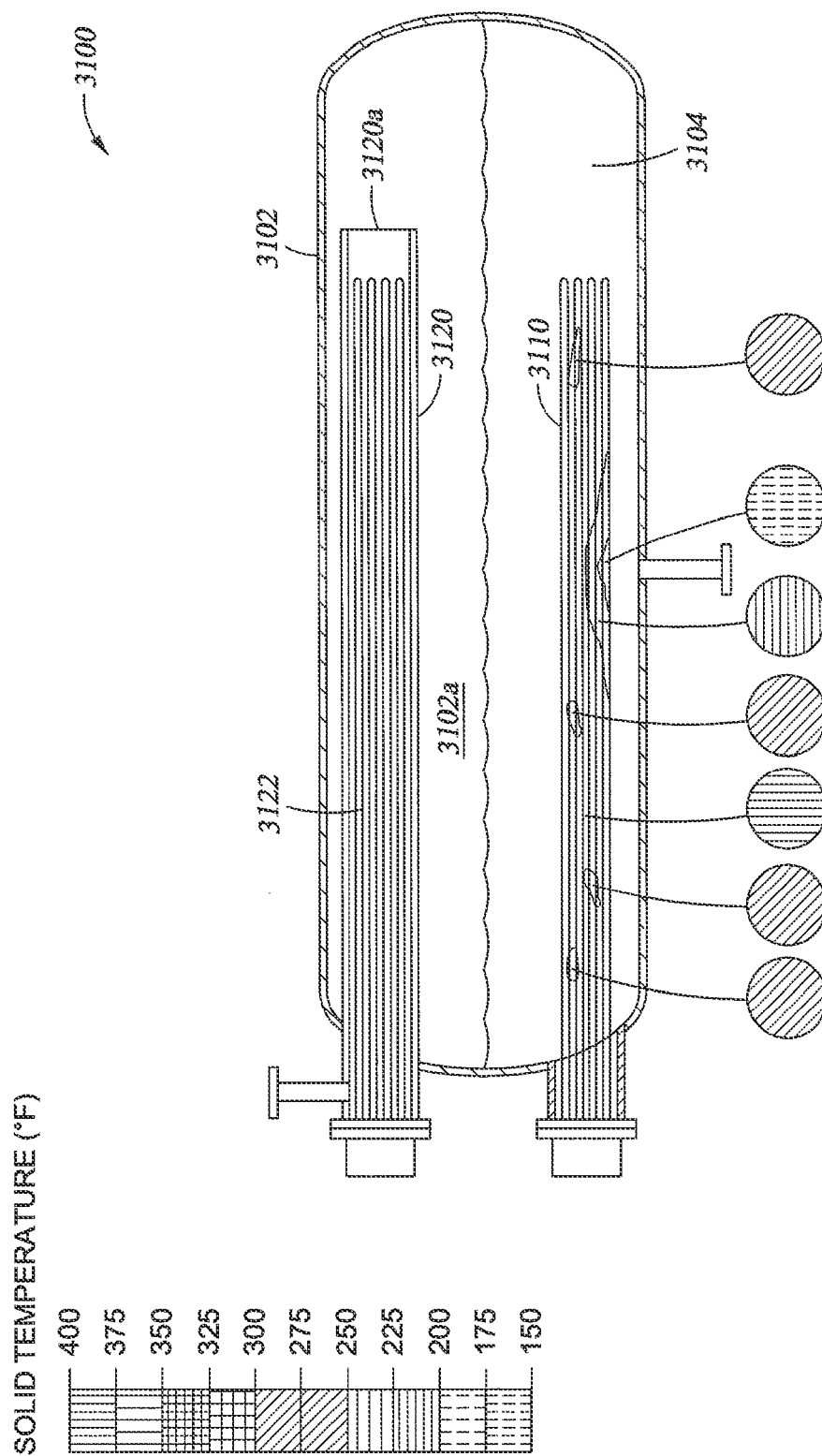
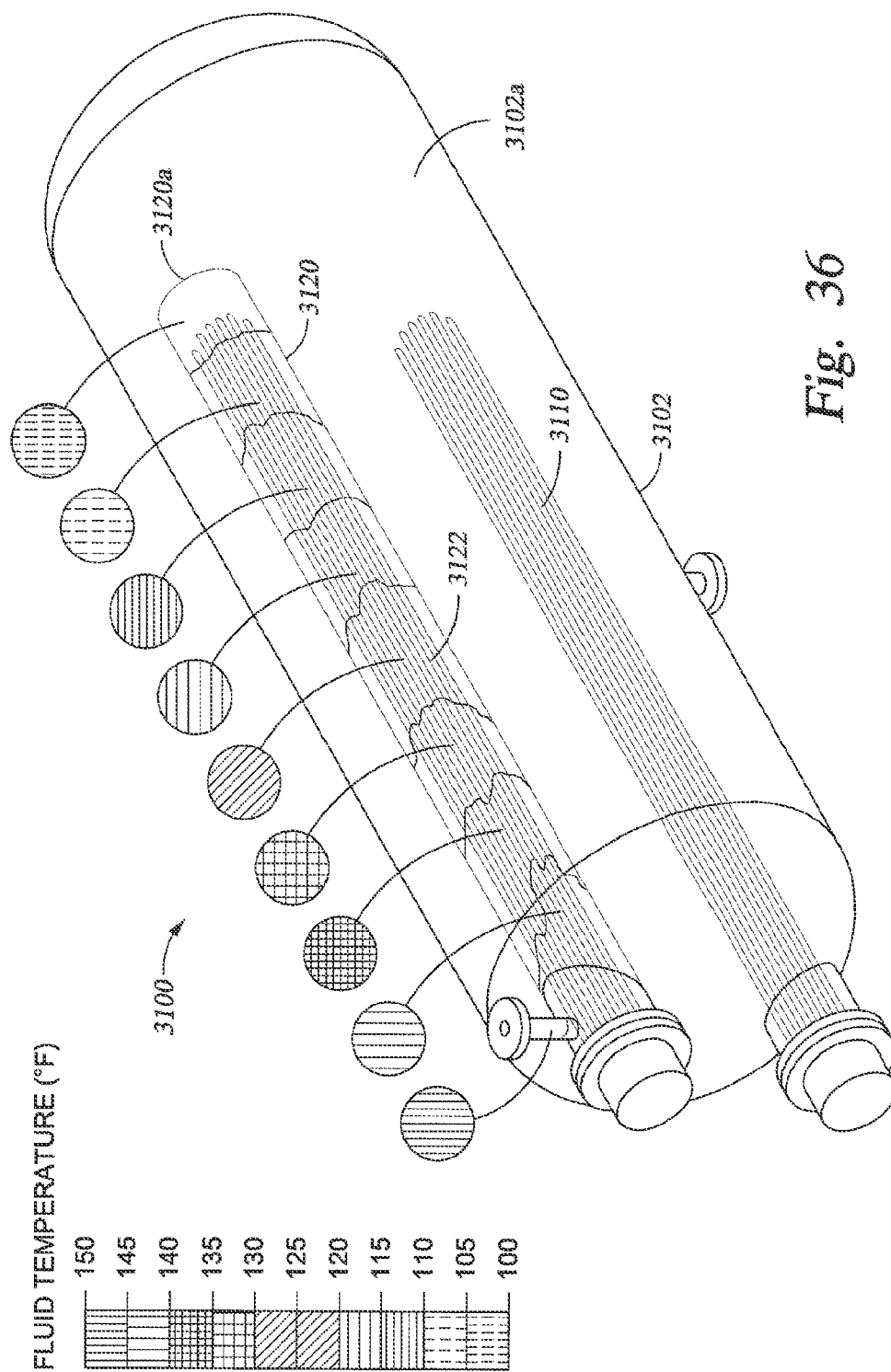
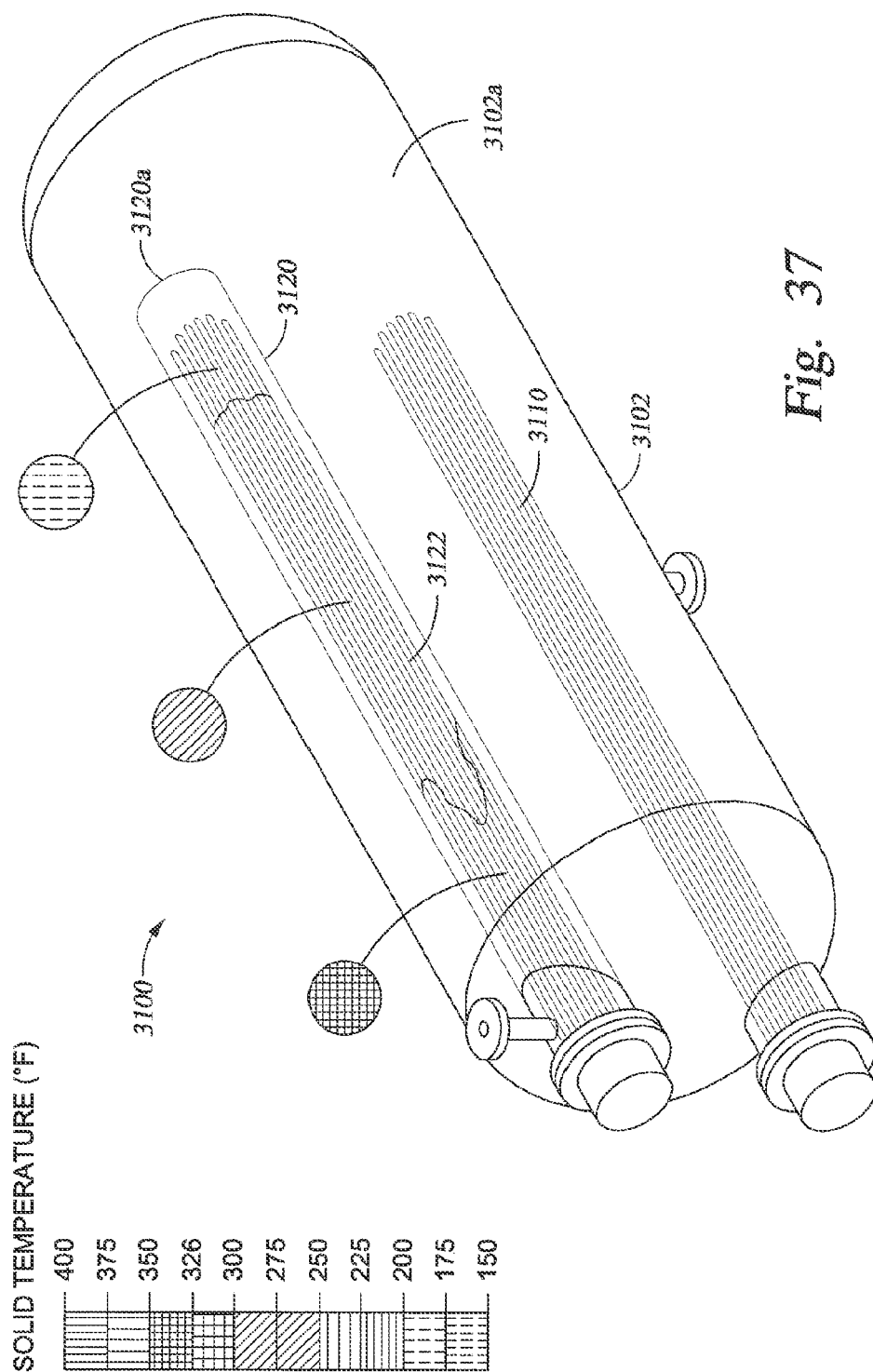


Fig. 35





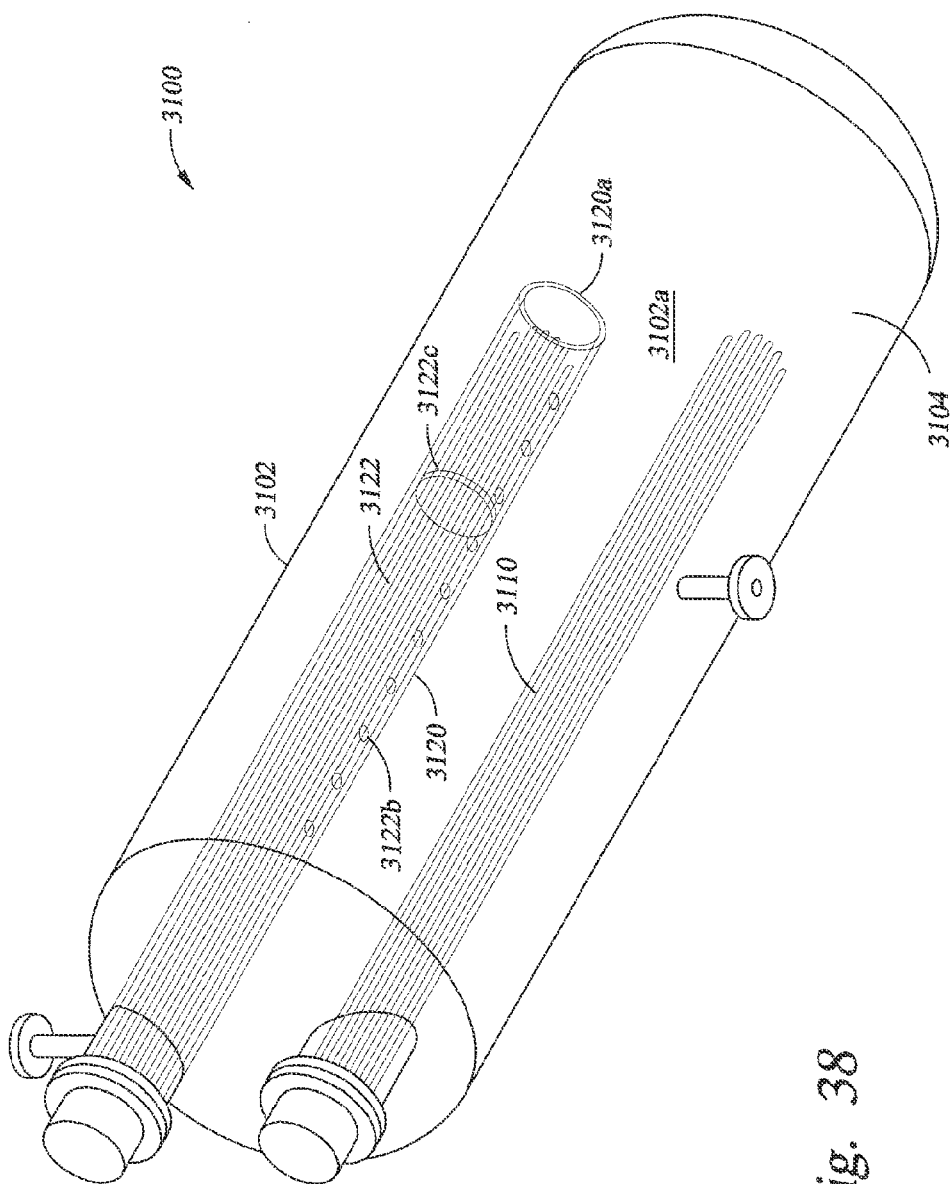


Fig. 38

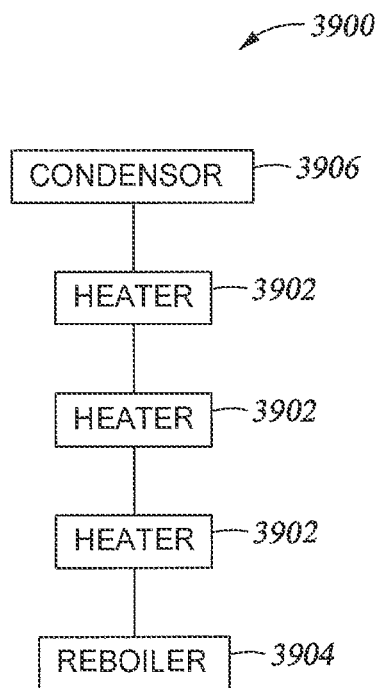


Fig. 39

HEATER FOR VAPORIZING LIQUIDS**CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS**

This application is a continuation of U.S. utility patent application Ser. No. 13/217,807, filed Aug. 25, 2011, which was a continuation in part of U.S. utility patent application Ser. Nos. 12/584,610, 12/584,626 and 12/584,640, respectively, filed on Sep. 9, 2009, Sep. 9, 2009 and Sep. 9, 2009, respectively, which were continuations in part of U.S. utility patent application Ser. No. 12/399,811, filed on Mar. 6, 2009, which was a continuation in part of U.S. utility patent application Ser. No. 12/029,957, filed on Feb. 12, 2008, which claimed priority to U.S. provisional patent application Ser. No. 60/889,324, filed on Feb. 12, 2007, the disclosures of which are incorporated herein by reference in their entireties and for all purposes.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. 1 is a schematic sectional view of an apparatus constructed in accordance with an exemplary embodiment of the invention.

FIG. 2 is a sectional view of the apparatus of FIG. 1 taken along the line 2-2 of FIG. 1.

FIG. 3 is a sectional view of a portion of an alternate embodiment of an apparatus in accordance with an exemplary embodiment of the invention.

FIG. 4 is a fragmentary cross sectional and schematic illustration of an alternate exemplary embodiment of a fuel gas conditioning system.

FIG. 5 is a fragmentary cross sectional illustration of the embodiment of FIG. 4.

FIG. 6 is a fragmentary cross sectional illustration of the embodiment of FIG. 4.

FIG. 7 is a graphical illustration of exemplary experimental results obtained during the operation of the embodiment of FIG. 4.

FIG. 8 is a perspective view of an exemplary embodiment of a scissor baffle assembly.

FIG. 9 is a perspective view of an exemplary embodiment of a scissor baffle assembly.

FIG. 10 is a perspective view of an exemplary embodiment of a scissor baffle assembly.

FIG. 11 is a perspective view of an exemplary embodiment of a scissor baffle assembly.

FIG. 12 is a perspective view of an exemplary embodiment of a scissor baffle assembly.

FIG. 13 is a perspective view of an embodiment of the invention that includes a plurality of scissor baffle assemblies.

FIG. 14 is a side view of an embodiment of the invention that includes a plurality of scissor baffle assemblies.

FIG. 15 is a top view of an embodiment of the invention that includes a plurality of scissor baffle assemblies.

FIG. 16 is a perspective view of an embodiment of the invention that includes a plurality of scissor baffle assemblies and heating elements.

FIG. 17 is a side view of an embodiment of the invention that includes a plurality of scissor baffle assemblies and heating elements.

FIG. 18 is a top view of an embodiment of the invention that includes a plurality of scissor baffle assemblies and heating elements.

FIG. 19 is a fragmentary perspective view of an embodiment of the invention that includes a plurality of scissor baffle assemblies and heating elements.

FIG. 20 is a fragmentary cross sectional and schematic illustration of an alternate embodiment of a fuel gas conditioning system.

FIG. 21 is a fragmentary perspective view of an experimental embodiment of the fuel gas conditioning system of FIG. 20 that illustrates the operating temperature of the fluidic material.

FIG. 22 is a fragmentary perspective view of an experimental embodiment of the fuel gas conditioning system of FIG. 20 that illustrates the operating temperature of the heating elements.

FIG. 23 is a fragmentary perspective view of an experimental embodiment of the fuel gas conditioning system of FIG. 20 that illustrates the operating pressure of the fluidic material.

FIG. 24 is a fragmentary perspective view of an experimental embodiment of the fuel gas conditioning system of FIG. 20 that illustrates the operating temperature of the walls of an inner tubular housing that contains heating elements.

FIG. 25 is a fragmentary perspective view of an experimental embodiment of the fuel gas conditioning system of FIG. 20 that illustrates the operating temperature of the heating elements within an inner tubular housing.

FIG. 26 is a fragmentary perspective view of an experimental embodiment of the fuel gas conditioning system of FIG. 20 that illustrates the operating pressure of the fluidic material that is heated by heating elements within an inner tubular housing.

FIG. 27 is a fragmentary perspective view of an experimental embodiment of the fuel gas conditioning system of FIG. 20 that illustrates the flow paths of the fluidic material that is heated by heating elements within an inner tubular housing.

FIGS. 28-30 are illustrations of exemplary embodiments of baffle assemblies.

FIG. 31 is a schematic illustration of an exemplary embodiment of a system for heating and vaporizing fluidic materials.

FIG. 32 is a schematic illustration of an exemplary embodiment of a system for heating and vaporizing fluidic materials.

FIG. 33 is a fragmentary cross sectional view of the vessel, heater elements and coalescing filter material of the system of FIG. 32.

FIG. 34 is an illustration of an exemplary experimental embodiment of the system of FIG. 31.

FIG. 35 is an illustration of an exemplary experimental embodiment of the system of FIG. 31.

FIG. 36 is an illustration of an exemplary experimental embodiment of the system of FIG. 31.

FIG. 37 is an illustration of an exemplary experimental embodiment of the system of FIG. 31.

FIG. 38 is a fragmentary schematic illustration of an exemplary embodiment of a system for heating and vaporizing fluidic materials.

FIG. 39 is a schematic illustration of an exemplary embodiment of a multi-stage distillation column assembly that includes one or more of the heaters 3100 and/or 3200 in series.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

Referring to FIG. 1, fuel gas conditioning system 11 includes a pressure vessel 13 having an interior chamber 12. Pressure vessel 13 is preferably cylindrical and has two closed ends 14, 16. The length of pressure vessel 13 considerably greater than its diameter. In this example, the longitudinal axis of pressure vessel 13 is horizontal.

3

A pre-heater unit 15 is mounted in pressure vessel 13 with its axis parallel and offset from the longitudinal axis of pressure vessel 13. Pre-heater unit 15 has a length somewhat greater than the length of pressure vessel 13 in this example, with its ends protruding past ends 14, 16 of pressure vessel 13. Pre-heater unit 15 has an outer tubular housing 17 and a concentric inner tubular housing 19, defining an annulus 21 between housings 17, 19. A plurality of electrical heater elements 23 extend longitudinally within inner housing 19.

Heater elements 23 are conventional elements, each comprising a metal tube containing an electrical resistance wire electrically insulated from the tube. In this embodiment, heater elements 23 are U-shaped, each having its terminal ends mounted within a connector housing 25 located exterior of end 14 of pressure vessel 13. The bent portions of heater elements 23 are located near the opposite end of pre-heater unit 15. A power controller 27 supplies power via wires 29 to electrical heater elements 23. Power controller 27 varies the power in response to temperature sensed by a temperature sensor 31 that is located within chamber 12 in pressure vessel 13.

Pre-heater unit 15 has an inlet 33 that leads to the interior of inner housing 19 of pre-heater unit 15 in the portion of pre-heater unit 15 exterior of pressure vessel end 14. In the embodiment of FIG. 1, an external conduit loop 35 is located on the opposite end of pre-heater unit 15, exterior of pressure vessel end 16. External loop 35 leads from the interior of inner housing 19 to annulus 21. A variable expansion valve 37 is located in external loop 35 for reducing the pressure of the gas flowing through external loop 35, which also results in cooling of the gas. Expansion valve 37 varies the amount of pressure drop in response to a pressure sensor 39 located within pressure vessel chamber 12.

Annulus 21 has an outlet 41 located within pressure vessel chamber 12 near end 14. A mist or coalescing filter 43 is located within pressure vessel chamber 12 approximately halfway between ends 14, 16 of pressure vessel 13. Coalescing filter 43 collects liquid mist from the gas flowing from annulus outlet 41 towards the pressure vessel end 16.

A super-heater 45 is mounted in pressure vessel chamber 12. Super-heater 45 has an elongated tubular housing 47 that has an axis parallel with the axis of pre-heater unit 15 and offset from the axis of pressure vessel 13. Super-heater 45 is located above pre-heater unit 15 in this example and has a length that is less than the length of pre-heater unit 15. Super-heater 45 has an inlet 49 in housing 47, inlet 49 being within pressure vessel chamber 12 and closer to pressure vessel end 16 than end 14. Super-heater 45 has a plurality of electrical resistance heater elements 51 located within housing 47.

Electrical resistance heater elements 51 may be of the same type as electrical resistance heater elements 23 of pre-heater unit 15. Preferably, each is U-shaped with both of its terminal ends mounted within a connector housing 53, which is external of end 14 of pressure vessel 13. A power controller 55 supplies power to electrical resistance heater elements 51. Power controller 55 controls the power in response to temperature sensed by a temperature sensor 57 located within an outlet 59 of super-heater 45. In this embodiment, outlet 59 leads from a portion of super-heater housing 47 that is external of pressure vessel 13.

Pressure vessel 13 has at least one drain 61 for draining liquid that condenses within chamber 13 upstream of filter 43 as a result of the pressure drop. A second drain 63 drains liquid that separates from the gas as a result of flowing through filter 43. Drains 61, 63 are located on opposite sides of filter 43 and lead downward from a lower point on the sidewall of pressure vessel 13. Each drain 61, 63 leads to a

4

separate sump 65, 66. In this example, sumps 65, 66 are compartments of a single tubular pressure vessel and separated from each other by a sealed plate 67. Outlets 69, 71 lead from the bottom of sumps 65, 66 to liquid control valves 73, 75. Each liquid control valve 73, 75 has a level controller 77, 79, respectively. Level controllers 77, 79 are conventional devices to open valves 73, 75 when the levels of liquid within sumps 65, 66 reach a selected amount, so as to discharge the liquid from sumps 65, 66. Other automatic drain arrangements are feasible.

Pressure vessel 13 has a pressure relief valve 81 in communication with its chamber 12. Pressure relief valve 81 is a conventional device to relieve pressure in the event that it reaches an excessive amount. Preferably, pressure vessel 13 has an access port 82 with a removable cap. Access port 82 is located in its sidewall in this embodiment. Access port 82 is of a size selected to allow a worker to enter chamber 12 for maintenance, particularly for removing and installing coalescing filter 43, which must be done periodically.

Referring to FIG. 2, coalescing filter 43 comprises an assembly of compressible pieces or segments that define an outer diameter that sealingly engages the inner diameter of pressure vessel 13. The multiple pieces of coalescing filter 43 are sized so that each will pass through access port 82 (FIG. 1). These pieces include in this example a pair of central segments 83, 85 having inner edges 87 and outer edges 89 that are straight and parallel with each other. Inner edges 87 sealingly abut each other. Each inner edge 87 has a semi-cylindrical recess 91 for engaging super-heater 45. Each inner edge 87 has a semi-cylindrical recess 93 for fitting around pre-heater unit 15. Each central segment 83, 85 has outer diameter portions 95 on opposite ends that are partially cylindrical and sealingly engage the inner diameter of pressure vessel 13.

Coalescing filter 43 also has two side segments 97, 99 in this embodiment. Each side segment 97, 99 has a straight inner edge 101 that abuts one of the outer edges 89 of one of the central segments 83, 85. Each side segment 97 has an outer diameter portion 103 that seals against the inner diameter of pressure vessel 13. Segments 83, 85, 97 and 99 are compressible so as to exert retentive forces against each other and against pressure vessel 13 to hold them in place. Retainers (not shown) may also be employed to hold the segments of coalescing filter 43 in position.

Fuel gas conditioning system 11 serves to condition fuel gas for gas turbines. Gas turbines, particularly low pollution types, require a dry feed gas that has a selected amount of superheat, such as 50 degrees above its dew point curve. The term "superheat" is a conventional industry term to refer to a range where the pressure and temperature of the fuel gas are above a range where condensation can occur. Referring to FIG. 1, feed gas enters inlet 49 at a pressure that may be, for example, 1,000 to 1,300 psig and at a temperature from 60-80° F. The feed gas flows through inner housing 19 of pre-heater unit 15, which increases the temperature of the feed gas a selected amount over the temperature of the incoming gas. For example, the temperature may be approximately 100-120° F. as it exits inner housing 19, and the pressure would be approximately the same as at inlet 49.

This preheated gas then flows through expansion valve 37, causing a pressure drop to a selected level below the dew point curve, as monitored by pressure sensor 39. For example, if the intake pressure is 1,000 to 1,300 psig, the pressure may drop to approximately 450-500 psig. The temperature will also drop to perhaps 60-80° F., and at this temperature and pressure, the gas will be below its dew point curve. The lower pressure cooler gas flows back through annulus 21 in pre-

5

heater unit **15**, which adds additional heat. At annulus outlet **41**, the pressure may still be around 450-550 psig and the temperature may be 70-100° F., but still below the dew point. Controller **27** controls the power to heater elements **23** to maintain a desired temperature at outlet **41** as monitored by sensor **31**.

Because the drop in pressure at expansion valve **37** caused the gas to be below its dew point, some of the liquids contained within the gas will condense in chamber **14** upstream of filter **43**. Also, liquids will be separated from the gas by coalescing filter **43** as the gas flows through coalescing filter **43**. The liquids collect on the bottom of pressure vessel **13** and flow through outlets **61**, **63** into sumps **65**, **66** and out through valves **73**, **75**.

After passing through filter **43**, the gas flows toward pressure vessel end **16** and enters inlet **49** of super-heater **45**. Electrical resistance heater elements **51** add heat to the dry gas in an amount that will place the temperature of the gas well above its dew point curve, such as by 50 degrees. The gas, now in a superheated condition, flows out outlet **59** at for example 110-130° F.° F. and 450-550 psig. The gas from outlet **59** flows into a conventional gas turbine (not shown).

FIG. 3 shows a portion of an alternate embodiment wherein pressure vessel **105** contains an expansion valve **107** within its interior. In the first embodiment, expansion valve **37** is located on the exterior of pressure vessel **13**. In FIG. 3, pre-heater inner housing **109** and outer housing **11** have one end within pressure vessel **105** instead of on the exterior as in the first embodiment. Heater elements **113** are contained within inner housing **109** as in the first embodiment. A valve actuator **115** controls the orifice of expansion valve **107**. Valve actuator **115** varies the pressure drop in response to pressure sensed by a pressure sensor **117** located within the interior of pressure vessel **105**. The second embodiment operates in the same manner as the first embodiment.

The gas conditioner is compact as the components are principally contained within a single pressure vessel. This arrangement reduces the amount of space required and the external flowlines connecting the various components.

Referring now to FIGS. 4, 5 and 6, an exemplary embodiment of a fuel gas conditioning system **200** includes a pre-heater assembly **202** that includes an outer tubular housing **204** and an inner tubular housing **206** that defines a longitudinal passage **206a** that is positioned and supported within the outer tubular housing. An annulus **208** is thereby defined between the outer and inner tubular housings, **204** and **206**. Heating elements, **210a** and **210b**, are positioned and supported within the passage **206a** of the inner tubular housing **206**. In an exemplary embodiment, the heating element **210a** extends through and is positioned within an upper portion of the inner tubular housing **206** and the heating element **210b** extends through and is positioned within a lower portion of the inner tubular housing **206**. In an exemplary embodiment longitudinally spaced apart baffles, **214** and **216**, are received within and are coupled to the inner tubular housing **206**.

The baffle **214** defines a longitudinal passage **214a** for receiving a portion of the heating element **210a** and the baffle **216** defines a longitudinal passage **216a** for receiving a portion of the heating element **210b**. In an exemplary embodiment, the baffle **214** includes a peripheral arcuate portion that engages and mates with an upper portion of the interior surface of the inner tubular housing **206** and the baffle **216** includes a peripheral arcuate portion that engages and mates with a lower portion of the interior surface of the inner tubular housing. In this manner, an annular axial flow passage **218** is defined between the heating elements **210a** and the baffle **214** and an annular axial flow passage **220** is defined

6

between the heating element **210** and the baffle **216**. Furthermore, in this manner, a lower axial flow passage **222** is defined between the lower periphery of the baffle **214** and the interior surface of the lower portion of the inner tubular housing **206** and an upper axial flow passage **224** is defined between the lower periphery of the baffle **216** and the interior surface of the upper portion of the inner tubular housing **206**. In this manner, the flow of fluidic materials in an axial direction through the inner tubular housing **206** may flow through the annular passages, **218** and **220**, and in a serpentine path by virtue of the apart axial flow passages **222** and **224**.

In an exemplary embodiment, the inside diameters of the longitudinal passages, **214a** and **216a**, of the spaced apart baffles, **214** and **216**, are about 1/16 to 1/8 inch greater than the outside diameters of the heating elements, **210a** and **210b**, that pass therethrough.

In an exemplary embodiment, the outer tubular housing **204** may be fabricated from, for example, a lower carbon steel tube having a wall thickness of about 0.280 inches and the inner tubular housing **206** may be fabricated from, for example, an H grade stainless steel having a wall thickness of about 0.134 inches. In an exemplary embodiment, the longitudinal spacing of the baffles, **214** and **216**, may, for example, be about equal to the internal diameter of the inner tubular housing **206**. In an exemplary embodiment, the heating elements **210a** and **210b**, may, for example, be conventional electrical operating heating elements such as, for example, heating elements commercially available from Gaumer Process in Houston, Tex.

A source **222** of an inlet stream of fluidic material is operably coupled to one end of the annulus **208** by a conduit **224** for conveying the inlet stream of fluidic materials into the annulus and a conduit **226** is operably coupled to another end of the annulus for conveying fluidic materials from the other end of the annulus into an end of the passage **206a**. A conduit **228** is operably coupled to another end of the passage **206a** for conveying fluidic materials from the other end of the passage into an outlet stream **230**. In this manner, fluidic materials flow through the preheater assembly **202** by entering one end of the annulus **208**, traveling through to the other end of the annulus, exiting the other end of the annulus through the conduit **226**, entering one end of the passage **206a**, passing through the passage, including passing through the annular axial passages, **218** and **220**, and the axial passages, **222** and **224**, and finally exiting the other end of the passage **206a** into the passage **228** into an outlet stream **230**. Thus, fluidic materials flow in one axial direction within the annulus **208** and in an opposite axial direction within the passage **206a**.

In an exemplary embodiment, the source **222** of an inlet stream of fluidic material may, for example, include gaseous, liquid, ambient air, and/or natural gas materials and the outlet **230** may, for example, be used to provide a fuel source for a gas turbine.

In an exemplary embodiment, a controller **232** is operably coupled to the heating elements, **210a** and **210b**, for controlling the operation of the heating elements. In an exemplary embodiment, the controller **232** is further operably coupled to thermocouples, **234**, **236** and **238**, that in turn are operably coupled to the fluidic materials within the conduits, **224**, **226** and **228**. In this manner, the controller **232** may monitor the operating temperature of the fluidic materials within the conduits, **224**, **226** and **228**. In an exemplary embodiment, the controller **232** is also operably coupled to a flow control valve **238** for controlling the flow of fluidic materials through the conduit **226**.

In an exemplary embodiment, during operation, fluidic materials from the source **222** are conveyed into one end of the annulus **208** by the conduit **224**. Within the conduit **208**, the fluidic materials are preheated by heat transmitted into the annulus through the walls of the inner tubular housing **206**. Thus, in an exemplary embodiment, the operating temperature of the fluidic materials at the end of the annulus **208** are increased as they pass from the end of the annulus to the other end of the annulus. The fluidic materials then exit the other end of the annulus **208** and are conveyed to the end of the passage **206a** by the conduit **226**. Within the passage **206a**, the fluidic materials are heated further by their interaction with the heating elements, **210a** and **210b**. The heating of the fluidic materials within the passage **206a** by the heating elements, **210a** and **210b**, is significantly enhanced by forcing the fluidic materials to pass through the annular passages, **218** and **220**, and the serpentine flow in the axial direction due to the baffles, **214** and **216**. As a result, the operating temperature of the fluidic materials at the end of the passage **206a** are significantly increased as they pass through the passage to the other end of the passage. The fluidic materials then exit the other end of the passage **206a** and are conveyed to the outlet stream **230** by the conduit **228**.

In an exemplary embodiment, the system **200** includes a plurality of baffles **214** which are interleaved with a plurality of baffles **216**. In an exemplary embodiment, the system **200** includes a plurality of heating elements, **210a** and **210b**.

In a first exemplary experimental embodiment, the system **200** of FIGS. **4**, **5** and **6** was operated and yielded the following results:

Elements of the system 200	Parameter Value
The outer tubular housing 204	6 inch, schedule 40, carbon steel pipe
The inner tubular housing 206	5 inch, schedule 10, 304H stainless steel pipe
Number, spacing and outside diameter of heating elements 210	9, 5 inches, and 0.475 inches
Number of baffles, 214 and 216	10 baffles 214 interleaved with 10 baffles 216
Temperature and mass flow rate of inlet stream 218	70° F. and 293 lbs/hour
Temperature of outlet stream 226	1200° F.
Heat transfer coefficient of the system 200	25.31 btu/hr*ft ² *° F.

In a second exemplary experimental embodiment, the system **200** of FIGS. **4**, **5** and **6** was operated, without the baffles, **214** and **216**, and yielded the following results:

Elements of the system 200	Parameter Value
The outer tubular housing 204	6 inch, schedule 40, carbon steel pipe
The inner tubular housing 206	5 inch, schedule 10, 304H stainless steel pipe
Number, spacing and outside diameter of heating elements 210	9, 1.5 inches, and 0.475 inches
Number of baffles, 214 and 216	N/A
Temperature and mass flow rate of inlet stream 218	70° F. and 293 lbs/hour
Temperature of outlet stream 226	1200° F.
Heat transfer coefficient of the system 200	4 btu/hr*ft ² *° F.

In a third exemplary experimental embodiment, the system **200** of FIGS. **4**, **5** and **6** was operated and yielded the following results:

Elements of the system 200	Parameter Value
The outer tubular housing 204	14 inch, standard carbon steel pipe
The inner tubular housing 206	12 inch, schedule 10, 304H stainless steel pipe
Number, spacing and outside diameter of heating elements 210	48, 1.5 inches, and 0.475 inches
Number of baffles, 214 and 216	5 baffles 214 interleaved with 5 baffles 216
Temperature and mass flow rate of inlet stream 218	80° F. and 1880 lbs/hour
Temperature of outlet stream 226	1000° F.
Heat transfer coefficient of the system 200	72.07 btu/hr*ft ² *° F.

In a fourth exemplary experimental embodiment, the system **200** of FIGS. **4**, **5** and **6** was operated, without the baffles, **214** and **216**, and yielded the following results:

Elements of the system 200	Parameter Value
The outer tubular housing 204	14 inch, standard carbon steel pipe
The inner tubular housing 206	12 inch, schedule 10, 304H stainless steel pipe
Number, spacing and outside diameter of heating elements 210	48, 1.5 inches, and 0.475 inches
Number of baffles, 214 and 216	N/A
Temperature and mass flow rate of inlet stream 218	80° F. and 1880 lbs/hour
Temperature of outlet stream 226	1000° F.
Heat transfer coefficient of the system 200	12.2 btu/hr*ft ² *° F.

In a fifth exemplary experimental embodiment, the system **200** of FIGS. **4**, **5** and **6** was operated and yielded the following results:

Elements of the system 200	Parameter Value
The outer tubular housing 204	14 inch, standard carbon steel pipe
The inner tubular housing 206	12 inch, schedule 10, 304H stainless steel pipe
Number, spacing and outside diameter of heating elements 210	36, 1.5 inches, and 0.475 inches
Number of baffles, 214 and 216	13 baffles 214 interleaved with 13 baffles 216
Temperature and mass flow rate of inlet stream 218	80° F. and 1135 lbs/hour
Temperature of outlet stream 226	800° F.
Heat transfer coefficient of the system 200	57.8 btu/hr*ft ² *° F.

In a sixth exemplary experimental embodiment, the system **200** of FIGS. **4**, **5** and **6** was operated, without the baffles, **214** and **216**, and yielded the following results:

Elements of the system 200	Parameter Value
The outer tubular housing 204	14 inch, standard carbon steel pipe
The inner tubular housing 206	10 inch, schedule 10, 304H stainless steel pipe
Number, spacing and outside diameter of heating elements 210	36, 1.5 inches, and 0.475 inches
Number of baffles, 214 and 216	N/A
Temperature and mass flow rate of inlet stream 218	80° F. and 1135 lbs/hour
Temperature of outlet stream 226	800° F.
Heat transfer coefficient of the system 200	9.8 btu/hr*ft ² *° F.

In a seventh exemplary experimental embodiment, the system **200** of FIGS. **4**, **5** and **6** was operated and yielded the following results:

Elements of the system 200	Parameter Value
The outer tubular housing 204	10 inch, schedule 40, carbon steel pipe
The inner tubular housing 206	8 inch, schedule 10, 304H stainless steel pipe
Number, spacing and outside diameter of heating elements 210	24, 1.5 inches, and 0.475 inches
Number of baffles, 214 and 216	13 baffles 214 interleaved with 13 baffles 216
Temperature and mass flow rate of inlet stream 218	348° F. and 1628 lbs/hour
Temperature of outlet stream 226	800° F.
Heat transfer coefficient of the system 200	53.23 btu/hr*ft ² *° F.

In a eighth exemplary experimental embodiment, the system **200** of FIGS. **4**, **5** and **6** was operated, without the baffles, **214** and **216**, and yielded the following results:

Elements of the system 200	Parameter Value
The outer tubular housing 204	10 inch, schedule 40, carbon steel pipe
The inner tubular housing 206	8 inch, schedule 10, 304H stainless steel pipe
Number, spacing and outside diameter of heating elements 210	24, 1.5 inches, and 0.475 inches
Number of baffles, 214 and 216	N/A
Temperature and mass flow rate of inlet stream 218	348° F. and 1628 lbs/hour
Temperature of outlet stream 226	800° F.
Heat transfer coefficient of the system 200	9.2 btu/hr*ft ² *° F.

The exemplary test results of the system **200** that demonstrated an increased heat transfer for the system **200** with the baffles, **214** and **216**, versus the system without the baffles were unexpected.

In an exemplary embodiment, one or more of the baffles, **216** and **218**, within the system **200** may be omitted.

In an exemplary embodiment, during the operation of the system **200**, the heat generated by the heating elements **210** is transmitted by a combination of radiation, conduction and convection to the interior surface of the inner tubular housing **206**. As a result, the operating temperature of the inner tubular housing **206** is increased and the fluidic material that flows within the annular passage **208** may be pre-heated by heat transmitted from the exterior surface of the inner tubular housing **206** to the annular passage by a combination of radiation, conduction and convection. Furthermore, as a result, the material composition of the outer tubular housing **204** that is required for typical operating conditions does not have to be as tolerant of heat and temperature as the inner tubular housing **206**. For example, for typical operating conditions of the system **200**, the outer tubular housing **204** may be fabricated from a carbon steel pipe while the inner tubular housing **206** may be fabricated from a high temperature stainless steel pipe.

In an exemplary embodiment, the counter flow of the fluidic materials within the system **200**, through the inner passage **206a** in a first axial direction, and the outer annular passage **208** in a second opposite axial direction, enhances heat transfer to the fluidic material that pass through the system and thereby decreases the response time within the system to changes in operating conditions such as, for

example, step changes in one or more of the flow rate, the operating temperature(s), and the fluid composition.

In an exemplary embodiment, the use of outer and inner tubular housings, **204** and **206**, in which the inner tubular housing houses the heating elements **210** and contains the radiant energy generated by the heating elements, permits the composition of the outer tubular housing to be less tolerant of high temperature operating conditions and thereby composed of a typically less expensive and lighter weight material.

In an exemplary embodiment, the use of outer and inner tubular housings, **204** and **206**, in which the inner tubular housing houses the heating elements **210** and contains the radiant energy generated by the heating elements, and the counter flow and forced convection of the fluidic materials within the system **200**, through the inner passage **206a** in a first direction, and the outer annular passage **208** in a second opposite direction, enhances heat transfer.

In an exemplary embodiment, one or more aspects of the system of FIGS. **1**, **2** and **3** may be combined in whole, or in part, with one or more aspects of the systems of FIGS. **4**, **5** and **6**.

In an exemplary experimental embodiment, as illustrated in FIG. **7**, operation of the system **200** of FIG. **4** provided a serpentine flow pattern within the inner tubular housing **206** due to the presence of the baffles, **214** and **216**.

Referring now to FIG. **8**, an exemplary embodiment of a baffle assembly **300** includes a first baffle element **302**, a second baffle element **304**, a third baffle element **306**, a fourth baffle element **308**, and a hinge **310** that is coupled to each of the first, second, third and fourth baffle elements. The first, second, third, and further baffle elements, **302**, **304**, **306** and **308**, each define one or more passageways, **302a**, **304a**, **306a** and **308a**, respectively, and the hinge **310** at least partially defines one or more passageways **310a**.

The first baffle element **302** includes an outer peripheral portion **302b** having an arcuate shape, an inner peripheral portion **302c** that is pivotally coupled to one side of the hinge **310** having a linear shape, and a side peripheral portion **302d** having a linear shape. The second baffle element **304** includes an outer peripheral portion **304b** having an arcuate shape, an inner peripheral portion **304c** that is pivotally coupled to another side of the hinge **310** having a linear shape, and a side peripheral portion **304d** having a linear shape. The third baffle element **306** includes an outer peripheral portion **306b** having an arcuate shape, an inner peripheral portion **306c** that is pivotally coupled to the one side of the hinge **310** having a linear shape, and a side peripheral portion **306d** having a linear shape. The fourth baffle element **308** includes an outer peripheral portion **308b** having an arcuate shape, an inner peripheral portion **308c** that is pivotally coupled to the other side of the hinge **310** having a linear shape, and a side peripheral portion **308d** having a linear shape. In an exemplary embodiment, the outer peripheral surfaces of the first, second, third, and fourth baffle elements, **302**, **304**, **306** and **308**, respectively, and the hinge **310**, together define a circular shape.

In an exemplary embodiment, the radius of curvatures of the arcuate shaped outer peripheral portions **302b**, **304b**, **306b** and **308b**, of the first, second, third and fourth baffle elements, **302**, **304**, **306** and **308**, respectively, are substantially constant and equal to one another. In an alternative embodiment, one or more of the radius of curvatures of the arcuate shaped outer peripheral portions **302b**, **304b**, **306b** and **308b**, of the first, second, third and fourth baffle elements, **302**, **304**, **306** and **308**, respectively, may be variable and/or not equal to one or more of the other radius of curvatures.

11

In an exemplary embodiment, because of the pivotal connections of the first, second, third and fourth baffle elements, **302**, **304**, **306** and **308**, respectively, to the hinge **310**, the first, second, third and fourth baffle elements may each be independently positioned in corresponding plane which may, for example, be different from one another.

In an exemplary embodiment, the angular spacing between the first, second, third and fourth baffle elements, **302**, **304**, **306** and **308**, respectively, ranges from about 15 to 75 degrees.

Referring now to FIG. 9, an exemplary embodiment of a baffle assembly **400** includes a first baffle element **402**, a second baffle element **404**, and a hinge **406** that is coupled to each of the first and second baffle elements. The first and second baffle elements, **402** and **404**, each define one or more passageways, **402a** and **404a**, respectively.

The first baffle element **402** includes an outer peripheral portion **402b** having an arcuate shape, an inner peripheral portion **402c** having a linear shape, and a side peripheral portion **402d** having a linear shape. The second baffle element **404** includes an outer peripheral portion **404b** having an arcuate shape, an inner peripheral portion **404c** having a linear shape, and a side peripheral portion **404d** having a linear shape.

In an exemplary embodiment, the outer peripheral surfaces of the first and second baffle elements, **402** and **404**, respectively, together define a semi-circular shape.

In an exemplary embodiment, the radius of curvatures of the arcuate shaped outer peripheral portions **402b** and **404b** of the first and second baffle elements, **402** and **404**, respectively, are substantially constant and equal to one another. In an alternative embodiment, one or more of the radius of curvatures of the arcuate shaped outer peripheral portions **402b** and **404b** of the first and second baffle elements, **402** and **404**, respectively, may be variable and/or not equal to one or more of the other radius of curvatures.

In an exemplary embodiment, because of the pivotal connections of the first and second baffle elements, **402** and **404**, respectively, to the hinge **406**, the first and second baffle elements may each be independently pivoted about an axis of rotation **408** to corresponding planes which may, for example, be different from one another.

In an exemplary embodiment, the angular spacing between the first and second baffle elements, **402** and **404**, respectively, ranges from about 15 to 75 degrees.

Referring now to FIGS. 10-12, an exemplary embodiment of a baffle assembly **500** includes the baffle assembly **300** and the baffle assembly **400** positioned proximate one another. In an exemplary embodiment, in the baffle assembly **500**, the first and second baffle elements, **302** and **304**, respectively, of the baffle assembly **300** are positioned in a common plane, and the third and fourth baffle elements, **306** and **308**, respectively, of the baffle assembly **300** are positioned in another common plane. In an exemplary embodiment, in the baffle assembly **500**, the first and second baffle elements, **402** and **404**, respectively, of the baffle assembly **400** are positioned in different planes. In an exemplary embodiment, in the baffle assembly **500**, the common plane of the first and second baffle elements, **302** and **304**, respectively, of the baffle assembly **300**, the common plane of the third and fourth baffle elements, **306** and **308**, respectively, of the baffle assembly **300**, the plane of the first baffle element **402** of the baffle assembly **400**, and the plane of the second baffle element **404** of the baffle assembly **400** are all different from one another. In an exemplary embodiment, in the baffle assembly **500**, the longitudinal axis of the hinge **310** of the baffle assembly **300** is

12

positioned in a different orientation from the axis of rotation **408** of the baffle assembly **400**.

Referring now to FIGS. 13-15, an assembly **600** is shown that includes a tubular housing **602** that defines a longitudinal passageway **602a**, a radial passage **602b** and a radial passage **602c** and includes an open end **602d** and closed end **602e**. A plurality of the baffle assemblies **500a-500g**, all substantially identical to the baffle assembly **500**, are positioned proximate to one another within the passageway **602a** of the tubular housing **602** extend from a location proximate the radial passage **602b** to a location proximate the radial passage **602c**. In an exemplary embodiment, at least a portion of one or more of the arcuate outer peripheral portions, **302b**, **304b**, **306b**, **308b**, **402b** and **404b**, of the baffle assemblies, **300** and **400**, mate with the interior surface of the tubular housing **602**.

Referring now to FIGS. 16-19, as assembly **700** is shown in which a plurality of heating elements **702** are positioned within the tubular housing **602** of the assembly **600**, with each of the heating elements passing through corresponding passageways, **302a**, **304a**, **306a**, **308a**, **402a** and **404a**, of the baffle assemblies **500**. In an exemplary embodiment, the heating elements **702** extend in a longitudinal direction within the housing **602** and are parallel to one another within the housing. In an exemplary embodiment, the heating elements **702** extend from the open end **602d** of the housing to a position proximate the radial passage **602c**. In an exemplary embodiment, the outside diameter of the heating elements **702** are less than the inside diameters of the corresponding passageways, **302a**, **304a**, **306a**, **308a**, **402a** and **404a**, in the baffle assemblies **500**. In an exemplary embodiment, the design and operation of the heating elements **702** is substantially identical to the heating elements **210**.

Referring now to FIG. 20, an exemplary embodiment of a fuel gas conditioning system **800** includes a preheater assembly **802** in which the assembly **700**, including the baffle assemblies **500**, tubular housing **602**, and heating elements **702**, as described and illustrated above with reference to FIGS. 16-19, is positioned and supported within an outer tubular housing **804**. An annulus **806** is thereby defined between the outer and inner tubular housings, **804** and **602**.

A source **808** of an inlet stream of fluidic material is operably coupled to one end of the annulus **806** by a conduit **810** for conveying the inlet stream of fluidic materials into the annulus and a conduit **812** is operably coupled to another end of the annulus for conveying fluidic materials from the other end of the annulus into an end of the passage **602a** of the housing **602**. In an exemplary embodiment, the conduit **812** may, for example, be either the radial passage **602b** or **602c** of the housing **602**.

A conduit **814** is operably coupled to another end of the passage **602a** of the housing **602** for conveying fluidic materials from the other end of the passage into an outlet stream **816**. In an exemplary embodiment, the conduit **814** may, for example, be either the radial passage **602b** or **602c** of the housing **602**. In this manner, fluidic materials flow through the preheater assembly **802** by entering one end of the annulus **806**, traveling through to the other end of the annulus, exiting the other end of the annulus through the conduit **812**, entering one end of the passage **602a** of the housing **602**, passing through the passage, and finally exiting the other end of the passage **602a** of the housing **602** into the passage **814** into an outlet stream **816**. Thus, fluidic materials flow in one axial direction within the annulus **806** and in an opposite axial direction within the passage **602a** of the housing **602**.

In an exemplary embodiment, the source **808** of an inlet stream of fluidic material may, for example, include gaseous,

13

liquid, ambient air, and/or natural gas materials and the outlet **816** may, for example, be used to provide a fuel source for a gas turbine.

In an exemplary embodiment, a controller **818** is operably coupled to the heating element **702** for controlling the operation of the heating elements. In an exemplary embodiment, the controller **818** is further operably coupled to thermocouples, **820**, **822** and **824**, that in turn are operably coupled to the fluidic materials within the conduits, **810**, **812** and **814**. In this manner, the controller **818** may monitor the operating temperature of the fluidic materials within the conduits, **820**, **822** and **824**. In an exemplary embodiment, the controller **818** is also operably coupled to a flow control valve **826** for controlling the flow of fluidic materials through the conduit **812**.

In an exemplary embodiment, during operation of the fuel gas conditioning system **800**, fluidic materials from the source **808** are conveyed into one end of the annulus **806** by the conduit **810**. Within the annulus **806**, the fluidic materials are preheated by heat transmitted into the annulus through the walls of the inner tubular housing **602**. Thus, in an exemplary embodiment, the operating temperature of the fluidic materials at the end of the annulus **806** are increased as they pass from the end of the annulus to the other end of the annulus. The fluidic materials then exit the other end of the annulus **806** and are conveyed to the end of the passage **602a** of the tubular housing **602** by the conduit **812**. Within the passage **602a** of the housing **602**, the fluidic materials are heated further by their interaction with the heating elements **702**. The heating of the fluidic materials within the passage **602a** of the housing **602** by the heating elements **702** is significantly enhanced by forcing the fluidic materials to pass through the flow passages defined by the baffle assemblies **500**. As a result, the operating temperature of the fluidic materials at the end of the passage **602a** of the housing **602** are significantly increased as they pass through the passage to the other end of the passage. The fluidic materials then exit the other end of the passage **602a** and are conveyed to the outlet stream **816** by the conduit **814**.

In an exemplary embodiment, during operation of the during operation of the fuel gas conditioning system **800**, the flow passages defined by the baffle assemblies **500** constantly shear the fluidic materials thereby causing the fluidic materials to pass over the heating elements **702** at an angle as opposed to having the fluidic materials running along the length of the heating elements thereby enhancing the heating transfer from the heating elements to the fluidic material. In an exemplary embodiment, during operation of the during operation of the fuel gas conditioning system **800**, the flow passages defined by the baffle assemblies **500** constantly mix the fluidic materials around the heating elements **702** thereby enhancing the heating transfer from the heating elements to the fluidic material.

Referring to FIGS. **21-23**, in an exemplary experimental embodiment of the fuel gas conditioning system **800**, the operating temperatures of the fluidic materials within the tubular housing **602**, the operating temperatures of the heating elements **702** within the tubular housing, and the operating pressures of the fluidic materials within the tubular housing were generated in a computer generated simulation of the operation of the fuel gas conditioning system.

In several exemplary experimental embodiments, the systems **11**, **200** and **800** were operated, using predictive computer models of the systems with differing sets of operating parameters, and the results compared, as summarized below:

14

	Heat Transfer Coefficient (Btu/(hr* ft^2 * $^{\circ}\text{F.}$))		
	System 11	System 200	System 800
Operating Parameter Set 1	8.87	28.8	12.3
Operating Parameter Set 2	4.42	31.4	14
Operating Parameter Set 3	15.74	72	33

	Operating Temperature of the Heating Elements ($^{\circ}\text{F.}$)		
	System 11	System 200	System 800
Operating Parameter Set 1	1207	869	1090
Operating Parameter Set 2	1654	942	1147
Operating Parameter Set 3	987	638	757

The exemplary tabular experimental results for the systems **11**, **200** and **800** presented above were unexpected results.

As demonstrated by the exemplary experimental results above, the heat transfer coefficient was highest for the system **200** and lowest for the system **11** when the fluidic materials were being heated by the heating elements, **210** and **702**, respectively. However, the range of operating temperatures within the fluidic materials within the system **800** was less than that for the system **200** when the fluidic materials were being heated by the heating elements, **210** and **702**, respectively. As a result, the variation in the operating temperatures of the fluidic materials within the system **800** while being heated by the heating elements **702** was less than the variation in the operating temperatures of the fluidic materials within the system **200** while being heated by the heating elements **210**. As a result, in the system **800**, the heating elements **702** may be operated at a higher operating temperature since stresses that might otherwise damage the heating elements, such as wide temperature variations in the fluidic materials being heated thereby, are reduced versus the system **200**.

The exemplary experimental results summarized above further demonstrated that fluidic materials within the system **11** tend to flow in a longitudinal direction along the exterior surfaces of the heating elements, **23** and **51**.

The exemplary experimental results summarized above further demonstrated that fluidic materials within the system **200** generally tend to flow in a direction approximately transverse to the exterior surfaces of the heating elements **210**. However, as a result, the heat transfer from the heating elements **210** to the fluidic materials may not be uniform which can result in regions within the fluidic materials having different operating temperatures.

The exemplary experimental results summarized above further demonstrated that fluidic materials within the system **800** uniformly tend to flow in a direction approximately transverse to the exterior surfaces of the heating elements **702**. In the exemplary experimental embodiment of the system **800**, the fluid materials were deflected by the baffle assemblies **500** at angles ranging from 15 to 75 degrees. As a result, the heat transfer from the heating elements **702** to the fluidic materials is typically uniform which results in uniform operating temperatures within the fluidic materials. As a result, the operating temperatures of the heating elements **702** may be significantly higher and the operation of the heating elements is more reliable and failure rates are reduced.

15

In an exemplary experimental embodiment, as illustrated in FIG. 24, the system 800, using the operating parameter set 1, as also summarized above, the operating temperature of the wall of the tubular housing 602 ranged from about 713° F. near the inlet to about 917° F. near the outlet and the heat generation of the heating elements 702 within the tubular housing was about 212,990 Btu/hr. Furthermore, the operating pressure of the fluidic materials near the inlet of the tubular housing 602 was about 56.9 lbf/in² and the mass flow rate of the fluidic materials near the outlet of the tubular housing was about 0.897 lb/second.

In an exemplary experimental embodiment, as illustrated in FIG. 25, the system 800, using the operating parameter set 1, as also summarized above, the operating temperature of the heating elements 702 within the tubular housing 602 ranged from about 713° F. near the inlet to about 1090° F. near the outlet. Furthermore, as demonstrated in FIG. 25, in the system 800, the operating temperature of the heating elements 702 increase in a substantial even fashion in a direction from the inlet to the outlet of the tubular housing 602.

In an exemplary experimental embodiment, as illustrated in FIG. 26, the system 800, using the operating parameter set 1, as also summarized above, the operating temperature of the fluidic materials within the tubular housing 602 ranged from about 710° F. near the inlet to about 854° F. near the outlet.

In an exemplary experimental embodiment, as illustrated in FIG. 27, the system 800, using the operating parameter set 1, as also summarized above, the fluidic materials within the tubular housing 602 are deflected by the baffle assemblies 500 to flow in directions substantially transverse to the heating elements 702.

Referring now to FIGS. 28-30, several exemplary embodiments of tubular housings that include baffle assemblies 900 for shearing the flow of fluidic materials therein are illustrated. The baffle assemblies 900 include commercially available static mixers that cause shearing of fluids flowing through the flow passages defined by the baffle assemblies.

Referring now to FIG. 31, an exemplary embodiment of a system 3100 for heating and vaporizing fluidic materials includes a vessel 3102 that defines an inner chamber 3102a for containing fluidic materials 3104. A source 3106 of fluidic materials is operably coupled to a lower end portion of the vessel 3102 by an inlet passage 3108. One or more heater elements 3110 are positioned within the lower end portion of the vessel 3102 which are also operably coupled to a controller 3112 for controlling the operation of the heater elements.

A passage 3114 connects the lower end portion of the vessel 3102 with a level controller 3116 that is operably coupled to the controller 3112. A passage 3118 connects the level controller 3116 with an upper end portion of the vessel 3102 proximate an open end 3120a of a vessel 3102 positioned in the upper end portion of the vessel 3102. In an exemplary embodiment, the level controller 3116 includes one or more flow control valves for controlling the flow of fluidic materials from the passage 3114 to the passage 3118. One or more heater elements 3122 are positioned within the vessel 3120 which are also operably coupled to a controller 3112 for controlling the operation of the heater elements.

A passage 3124 connects another end portion of the vessel 3120 for exhausting fluidic materials from the system 3100 for use by another device. A temperature sensor 3126 is operably coupled to the passage 3124 and the controller 3112 for generating signals representative of the operating temperature of the fluidic materials within the passage 3124.

In an exemplary embodiment, during the operation of the system 3100, fluidic materials are conveyed from the source 3106 through the passage 3108 and into the lower end portion

16

of the vessel 3102. In an exemplary embodiment, the fluidic materials within the source 3106 may include liquid and/or gaseous materials. Within the vessel 3102, the fluidic materials are heated by operation of the heater elements 3110 under the control of the controller 3112. In an exemplary embodiment, heating of the fluidic materials within the lower end portion of the vessel 3102 by operation of the heater elements 3110 pressurizes the inner chamber 3102a of the vessel and may also, at least to some extent, vaporize at least a portion of the fluidic materials therein.

In an exemplary embodiment, fluidic materials within the lower end portion of the vessel 3102 may then be conveyed into the interior of the upper end of the vessel 3102a wherein at least a portion of the fluidic materials may enter the open end 3120a of the vessel 3120 through the passages 3114 and 3118 by operation of the level controller 3116 under the control of the controller 3112. The fluidic materials that are conveyed into the interior of the vessel 3120 are then heated by operation of the heater elements 3122. In an exemplary embodiment, heating of the fluidic materials within the interior of the vessel 3120 by operation of the heater elements 3122 will further pressurize the fluidic materials and may also completely vaporize the materials therein.

The materials within the interior of the vessel 3120 may then be conveyed out of the vessel through the passage 3124 for further processing and/or use. In an exemplary embodiment, the operating temperature of the materials within the passage 3124 are monitored by the temperature sensor 3126. In this manner, feedback control of the system 3100 may be provided in which a desired operating temperature of the materials within the passage 3124 is used as a set point in a feedback control system implemented by the controller 3112 that may, for example, be a second order feedback control system.

Referring now to FIGS. 32 and 33, an exemplary embodiment of a system 3200 for heating and vaporizing fluidic materials includes a vessel 3202 that defines an inner chamber 3202a for containing fluidic materials 3204. A source 3206 of fluidic materials is operably coupled to a lower end portion of the vessel 3202 by an inlet passage 3208, a flow control valve 3210 and an inlet passage 3212. In an exemplary embodiment, the flow control valve 3210 is also operably coupled to a controller 3214 for controlling the operation of the flow control valve. One or more heater elements 3216 are positioned within the lower end portion of the vessel 3202 which are also operably coupled to the controller 3214 for controlling the operation of the heater elements.

A passage 3218 connects the lower end portion of the vessel 3202 with a level controller 3220 that may also be operably coupled to the controller 3214. A passage 3222 connects the level controller 3220 with an upper end portion of the vessel 3202 proximate an open end 3224a of a vessel 3224 positioned with an upper portion of the vessel 3202. In an exemplary embodiment, the level controller 3220 includes one or more flow control valves for controlling the flow of fluidic materials from the passage 3218 to the passage 3222. One or more heater elements 3226 are positioned within the vessel 3224 which are also operably coupled to the controller 3214 for controlling the operation of the heater elements.

A passage 3228 connects another end portion of the vessel 3224 for exhausting fluidic materials from the system 3200 for use by another device. A temperature sensor 3230 and a pressure sensor 3232 are operably coupled to the passage 3228 and the controller 3214 for generating signals representative of the operating temperature and pressure of the fluidic materials within the passage 3228. A pressure relief valve 3234 is also operably coupled to the passage 3228 for releas-

17

ing pressure from the passage if the operating pressure exceeds the set point of the valve.

In an exemplary embodiment, as illustrated in FIG. 33, in an exemplary embodiment, the vessel 3224 includes at least one drainage passage 3224b defined in a lower end portion of the vessel for allowing liquids to drain out of the vessel 3224. In an exemplary embodiment, the vessel 3224 further includes a coalescing filter material 3236 positioned within the vessel that also surrounds at least some of the heater elements 3226 positioned within the vessel for enhancing the coalescence of liquid droplets within the vessel that may then be exhausted from the vessel through the passages 3224b.

In an exemplary embodiment, during the operation of the system 3200, fluidic materials are conveyed from the source 3206 through the passage 3208, the flow control valve 3210 and the passage 3212 and into the lower end portion of the vessel 3202. In an exemplary embodiment, the fluidic materials within the source 3206 may include liquid and/or gaseous materials. Within the vessel 3202, the fluidic materials are heated by operation of the heater elements 3216 under the control of the controller 3214. In an exemplary embodiment, heating of the fluidic materials within the lower end portion of the vessel 3202 by operation of the heater elements 3216 pressurizes the inner chamber 3202a of the vessel and may also, at least to some extent, vaporize at least a portion of the fluidic materials therein.

In an exemplary embodiment, fluidic materials within the lower end portion of the vessel 3202 may then be conveyed into the interior of the upper end portion of the vessel 3202 through the passages 3218 and 3222 by operation of the level controller 3220 under the control of the controller 3214. In an exemplary embodiment, at least a portion of the fluidic materials that are conveyed into the interior of the upper end portion of the vessel 3202 may thereby enter the open end 3224a of the vessel 3224. In an exemplary embodiment, the amount of fluidic materials within the vessel 3202 is further controlled by operation of the flow control valve 3210 and/or the level controller 3220.

The fluidic materials that are conveyed into the interior of the vessel 3224 are then heated by operation of the heater elements 3226. In an exemplary embodiment, heating of the fluidic materials within the interior of the vessel 3224 by operation of the heater elements 3226 will further pressurize the fluidic materials and may also completely vaporize the materials therein. In an exemplary embodiment, liquid droplets may coalesce on the coalescing filter 3236 within the vessel 3224 and be exhausted from the vessel through the passages 3224b. In an exemplary embodiment, during operation, the coalescing filter 3236 permits more heavy components, e.g., liquid droplets, to be separated from the flow stream which may also lower the dew point of the remaining components of the flow stream.

The materials within the interior of the vessel 3224 may then be conveyed out of the vessel through the passage 3228 for further processing and/or use. In an exemplary embodiment, the operating temperature and/or pressure of the materials within the passage 3228 are monitored by the temperature and pressure sensors, 3230 and 3232. In this manner, feedback control of the system 3200 may be provided in which a desired operating temperature and/or pressure of the materials within the passage 3228 are used as set points in a feedback control system implemented by the controller 3214 that may, for example, be a second order feedback control system.

In an exemplary embodiment, the systems 3100 and 3200 may include or omit one or more elements of the exemplary embodiments of the present disclosure.

18

Referring now to FIG. 34, an exemplary experimental embodiment of the system 3100 was created using a numerical model that was predictive of operational results that illustrates heating and boiling of the fluidic materials 3104 within the inner chamber 3102a of the vessel 3102.

Referring now to FIG. 35, an exemplary experimental embodiment of the system 3100 was created using a numerical model that was predictive of operational results that illustrates the operating temperature of the heater elements 3110 during the heating and boiling of the fluidic materials 3104 within the inner chamber 3102a of the vessel 3102.

Referring now to FIG. 36, an exemplary experimental embodiment of the system 3100 was created using a numerical model that was predictive of operational results that illustrates the operating temperature of the superheated gas within the inner chamber 3102a of the vessel 3102 and within the vessel 3120.

Referring now to FIG. 37, an exemplary experimental embodiment of the system 3100 was created using a numerical model that was predictive of operational results that illustrates the operating temperature of the heating elements 3122 within the vessel 3120 during the superheating of the gas within the inner chamber 3102a of the vessel 3102 and within the vessel 3120.

The exemplary experimental results illustrated in FIGS. 34-37 were unexpected.

In an exemplary embodiment, during operation of the system 3100, sub-cooled liquid enters the bottom portion of the vessel 3102. The heating elements 3110 then raise enthalpy of the liquid until it boils. Saturated vapor then enters the open end 3120a of the vessel 3120. Operation of the heating elements 3122 within the vessel 3120 then superheat the vapor to at least about 50° F. above the dew point.

In an exemplary embodiment, during operation of the system 3200, sub-cooled liquid enters the bottom portion of the vessel 3202. The heating elements 3216 then raise enthalpy of the liquid until it boils. Saturated vapor then enters the open end 3224a of the vessel 3224. Operation of the heating elements 3226 within the vessel 3224 then superheat the vapor to at least about 50° F. above the dew point.

In an exemplary embodiment, as illustrated in FIG. 38, the vessel 3120 of the system 3100 that contains the heating elements 3122 includes a plurality of spaced apart slots 3122b on a bottom portion and one or more mesh pads 3122c are positioned within the interior of the vessel 3120. In an exemplary embodiment, during operation of the system 3100, as entrained liquid droplets pass through the heated mesh pad 3122c, the lighter molecules vaporize and the heavier molecules coalesce and fall through the slots 3122b provided in the bottom wall of the vessel 3120. As a result, the separation process yields a greater than one stage of separation, less heat is required to superheat the saturated gas vapor, and the mesh pads 3122c enhance the transfer of heat from the heating elements 3122 to the gas vapor.

Referring now to FIG. 39, an exemplary embodiment of a distillation column assembly 3900 includes a plurality of heaters 3902, one or more of which may include one or more of the systems 3100 and/or 3200, that are coupled in series between a reboiler 3904 and a condenser 3906 to provide a multi-stage distillation column. In particular, the outlet of each of the systems 3100 and/or 3200 are operably coupled to the inlet of the next systems 3100 and/or 3200 in series fashion. The general design and operation of distillation column assemblies, other than the design and operation of the systems 3100 and/or 3200, is well known to persons having ordinary skill in the art. During operation, the outlet of each of the systems 3100 and/or 3200 are used to provide a source of

19

a hydrocarbon fraction. Thus, the systems **3100** and/or **3200** provide a more effective, efficient and controlled substitute for the conventional fractioning stages that are employed in a multi-stage distillation column. In this manner, different hydrocarbon components may be extracted within each heater **3902** of the assembly **3900**.

An apparatus for conditioning feed gas has been described that includes an outer tubular housing; an inner tubular housing that defines a passageway positioned within the outer tubular housing, wherein an end of the passageway is adapted to be operably coupled to an outlet stream of fluidic materials; a plurality of spaced apart baffles positioned within the passageway of the inner tubular housing, wherein each baffle defines at least one passageway; one or more heating elements positioned within the passageway of the inner tubular housing, wherein each heating element extends through a corresponding passageway in each of the baffles; and an annular passageway defined between the inner and outer tubular housings, wherein an inlet of the annular passageway is adapted to be operably coupled to an input stream of fluidic material, and wherein an outlet of the annular passageway is operably coupled to another end of the passageway of the inner tubular housing. In an exemplary embodiment, the outer tubular housing ranges from 4 inch, schedule 40 pipe to 24 inch, schedule 40 pipe; and wherein the inner tubular housing ranges from 3 inch, schedule 10 pipe to 20 inch, schedule 10 pipe. In an exemplary embodiment, the outer tubular housing is fabricated from materials selected from the group consisting of low carbon steel, 304 stainless steel, and 304H stainless steel; and the inner tubular housing is fabricated from materials selected from the group consisting of H grade stainless steel, 316H stainless steel, and chromoly steel. In an exemplary embodiment, the spacing of the baffles in a longitudinal direction within the passageway of the inner tubular housing ranges from about 2 to 60 inches. In an exemplary embodiment, the spacing of the baffles in a longitudinal direction within the passageway of the inner tubular housing is about equal to the internal diameter of the inner tubular housing. In an exemplary embodiment, the internal diameters of the passageways of the baffles are greater than the external diameters of the corresponding heating elements. In an exemplary embodiment, the internal diameters of the passageways of the baffles are at least about 10% greater than the external diameters of the corresponding heating elements. In an exemplary embodiment, the number of heating elements ranges from about 3 to 360. In an exemplary embodiment, the average center-to-center spacing of the heating elements ranges from about 1 to 5 inches. In an exemplary embodiment, the outside diameter of the heating elements are about 0.475 inches and the inside diameters of the passages, **214a** and **216a**, through the baffles, **214** and **216**, are about $\frac{1}{16}$ to about $\frac{1}{4}$ of an inch larger. In an exemplary embodiment, the inside diameters of the passages, **214a** and **216a**, through the baffles, **214** and **216**, are at least $\frac{1}{4}$ of an inch larger in diameter to allow for easier assembly.

A method for conditioning feed gas has been described that includes feeding an inlet stream of gas into an outer passageway in a first direction; then feeding the inlet stream of gas into an inner passageway in a second direction, in opposition to the first direction; heating the inlet stream of gas within the inner passageway; and impeding the flow of the inlet stream of gas within the inner passageway. In an exemplary embodiment, the method further includes heating the inlet stream of gas within the outer passageway. In an exemplary embodiment, the method further includes heating the inlet stream of gas within the outer passageway by transmitting heat from the inlet stream of gas within the inner passageway. In an exem-

20

plary embodiment, heating the inlet stream of gas within the inner passageway includes positioning a plurality of heating elements within the inner passageway. In an exemplary embodiment, impeding the flow of the inlet stream of gas within the inner passageway includes constricting the flow of the inlet stream of gas proximate the heating elements within the inner passageway. In an exemplary embodiment, impeding the flow of the inlet stream of gas within the inner passageway includes constricting the flow of the inlet stream of gas within the inner passageway.

An apparatus for conditioning feed gas has been described that includes an outer tubular housing; an inner tubular housing that defines a passageway and is positioned within the outer tubular housing, wherein an end of the passageway is adapted to be operably coupled to an outlet stream of fluidic materials; a plurality of baffle assemblies positioned within the passageway of the inner tubular housing; one or more heating elements positioned within the passageway of the inner tubular housing; and an annular passageway defined between the inner and outer tubular housings, wherein an inlet of the annular passageway is adapted to be operably coupled to an inlet stream of fluidic material, and wherein an outlet of the annular passageway is operably coupled to another end of the passageway of the inner tubular housing; wherein one or more of the baffle assemblies comprise a first baffle element and a second baffle element; wherein the first and second baffle elements each define one or more passages; wherein the first and second baffle elements are positioned in different planes; and wherein one or more of the heating elements extend through one or more of the passageways of one or more of the first and second baffle elements of one or more of the baffle assemblies. In an exemplary embodiment, the outer tubular housing ranges from 4 inch, schedule 40 pipe to 24 inch, schedule 40 pipe; and wherein the inner tubular housing ranges from 3 inch, schedule 10 pipe to 20 inch, schedule 10 pipe. In an exemplary embodiment, the outer tubular housing is fabricated from materials selected from the group consisting of low carbon steel, 304 stainless steel, and 304H stainless steel; and wherein the inner tubular housing is fabricated from materials selected from the group consisting of H grade stainless steel, 316H stainless steel, and chromoly steel. In an exemplary embodiment, the spacing of the baffles in a longitudinal direction within the passageway of the inner tubular housing ranges from about 2 to 60 inches. In an exemplary embodiment, the spacing of the baffle assemblies in a longitudinal direction within the passageway of the inner tubular housing is about equal to the internal diameter of the inner tubular housing. In an exemplary embodiment, the internal diameters of the passageways of the first and second baffle elements are greater than the external diameters of the corresponding heating elements. In an exemplary embodiment, the internal diameters of the passageways of the first and second baffle elements are at least about 10% greater than the external diameters of the corresponding heating elements. In an exemplary embodiment, the number of heating elements ranges from about 3 to 360. In an exemplary embodiment, the average center to center spacing of the heating elements ranges from about 1 to 5 inches. In an exemplary embodiment, the outside diameters of the heating elements are about 0.475 inches and the inside diameters of the corresponding passageways through the first and second baffle elements are about $\frac{1}{16}$ to about $\frac{1}{4}$ of an inch larger in diameter. In an exemplary embodiment, the inside diameters of the corresponding passageways through the first and second baffle elements are at least about $\frac{1}{4}$ of an inch larger in diameter to allow for easier assembly. In an exemplary embodiment, each of the first and second baffle elements

21

comprise an outer peripheral arcuate portion that mates with the inner tubular housing and another outer peripheral portion that does not mate with the inner tubular housing. In an exemplary embodiment, the baffle assemblies and the inner tubular housing define a serpentine flow path for the passage of fluidic materials therethrough. In an exemplary embodiment, the angular spacing between the planes of the first and second baffle elements ranges from about 15 to 75 degrees. In an exemplary embodiment, the lateral spacing of the baffle assemblies within the passageway of the inner tubular housing ranges from intimate contact to about several times the internal diameter of the inner tubular housing. In an exemplary embodiment, the baffle assemblies are adapted to shear the flow of fluidic materials within the passageway of the inner tubular housing. In an exemplary embodiment, the baffle assemblies are adapted to cause the fluidic materials within the passageway of the inner tubular housing to flow over the heating elements at an angle to the heating elements. In an exemplary embodiment, the baffle assemblies are adapted to cause the fluidic materials within the passageway of the inner tubular housing to mix over the heating elements at an angle to the heating elements.

A method for conditioning feed gas has been described that includes feeding an inlet stream of gas into an outer passageway in a first direction; then feeding the inlet stream of gas into an inner passageway, positioned within the outer passageway, in a second direction, in opposition to the first direction; heating the inlet stream of gas within the inner passageway; and impeding the flow of the inlet stream of gas within the inner passageway using a plurality of baffle elements that are positioned in different planes. In an exemplary embodiment, the method further includes heating the inlet stream of gas within the outer passageway. In an exemplary embodiment, the method further includes heating the inlet stream of gas within the outer passageway by transmitting heat from the inlet stream of gas within the inner passageway. In an exemplary embodiment, heating the inlet stream of gas within the inner passageway includes positioning a plurality of heating elements within the inner passageway. In an exemplary embodiment, impeding the flow of the inlet stream of gas within the inner passageway includes constricting the flow of the inlet stream of gas proximate the heating elements within the inner passageway. In an exemplary embodiment, impeding the flow of the inlet stream of gas within the inner passageway includes constricting the flow of the inlet stream of gas within the inner passageway. In an exemplary embodiment, impeding the flow of the inlet stream of gas within the inner passageway includes creating a serpentine flow of the inlet stream of gas within the inner passageway. In an exemplary embodiment, impeding the flow of the inlet stream of gas within the inner passageway further includes constricting the flow of the inlet stream of gas proximate the heating elements within the inner passageway. In an exemplary embodiment, the angular spacing between the planes of the baffle elements ranges from about 15 to 75 degrees. In an exemplary embodiment, the lateral spacing of the baffle elements within the inner passageway ranges from intimate contact to about several times the internal diameter of the inner tubular housing. In an exemplary embodiment, the method further includes shearing the flow of the inlet stream of gas within the inner passageway. In an exemplary embodiment, the method further includes flowing the inlet stream of gas within the inner passageway at an angle over one or more heating elements. In an exemplary embodiment, the method further includes mixing the inlet stream of gas within the inner passageway over one or more heating elements. In an exemplary embodiment, heating the inlet stream of gas within

22

the inner passageway includes providing one or more heating elements within the inner passageway; and wherein impeding the flow of the inlet stream of gas within the inner passageway includes causing the inlet stream of gas to flow in a direction transverse to the heating elements.

A system for conditioning feed gas has been described that includes means for feeding an inlet stream of gas into an outer passageway in a first direction; means for then feeding the inlet stream of gas into an inner passageway in a second direction, in opposition to the first direction; means for heating the inlet stream of gas within the inner passageway; and means for impeding the flow of the inlet stream of gas within the inner passageway. In an exemplary embodiment, the system further includes means for heating the inlet stream of gas within the outer passageway. In an exemplary embodiment, the system further includes means for heating the inlet stream of gas within the outer passageway by transmitting heat from the inlet stream of gas within the inner passageway. In an exemplary embodiment, the means for heating the inlet stream of gas within the inner passageway comprises means for positioning a plurality of heating elements within the inner passageway. In an exemplary embodiment, the means for impeding the flow of the inlet stream of gas within the inner passageway comprises means for constricting the flow of the inlet stream of gas proximate the heating elements within the inner passageway. In an exemplary embodiment, the means for impeding the flow of the inlet stream of gas within the inner passageway includes means for constricting the flow of the inlet stream of gas within the inner passageway. In an exemplary embodiment, the means for impeding the flow of the inlet stream of gas within the inner passageway includes means for creating a serpentine flow of the inlet stream of gas within the inner passageway. In an exemplary embodiment, the means for impeding the flow of the inlet stream of gas within the inner passageway further includes means for constricting the flow of the inlet stream of gas proximate the heating elements within the inner passageway. In an exemplary embodiment, the system further includes means for shearing the flow of the inlet stream of gas within the inner passageway. In an exemplary embodiment, the system further includes means for flowing the inlet stream of gas within the inner passageway at an angle to heating elements. In an exemplary embodiment, the system further includes means for mixing the inlet stream of gas within the inner passageway over heating elements. In an exemplary embodiment, means for heating the inlet stream of gas within the inner passageway comprises means for providing one or more heating elements within the inner passageway; and wherein means for impeding the flow of the inlet stream of gas within the inner passageway comprises means for causing the inlet stream of gas to flow in a direction transverse to the heating elements.

A baffle assembly for use in a tubular housing has been described that includes a first baffle element that defines one or more first passageways; a second baffle element that defines one or more second passageways; and a hinge coupled between the first and second baffle elements for permitting the first and second baffle elements to be positioned in different planes; wherein the first baffle element comprises an outer peripheral arcuate portion that mates with a portion of the interior surface of the tubular housing and another peripheral portion that does not mate with the interior surface of the tubular housing; and wherein the second baffle element comprises an outer peripheral arcuate portion that mates with a portion of the interior surface of the tubular housing and another peripheral portion that does not mate with the interior surface of the tubular housing. In an exemplary embodiment,

when the first and second baffle elements are positioned in a common plane, the baffle assembly includes a circular outer peripheral profile. In an exemplary embodiment, when the first and second baffle elements are positioned in a common plane, the baffle assembly comprises a semi-circular outer peripheral profile. In an exemplary embodiment, the hinge defines one or more passageways. In an exemplary embodiment, the hinge includes a base member; a first hinge coupled to the base member for pivoting the first baffle element; and a second hinge coupled to the base member for pivoting the second baffle element. In an exemplary embodiment, the baffle assembly further includes a third baffle element pivotally coupled to the hinge that defines one or more third passageways; and a fourth baffle element pivotally coupled to the hinge that defines one or more fourth passageways; wherein the third baffle element comprises an outer peripheral arcuate portion that mates with a portion of the interior surface of the tubular housing and another peripheral portion that does not mate with the interior surface of the tubular housing; and wherein the fourth baffle element comprises an outer peripheral arcuate portion that mates with a portion of the interior surface of the tubular housing and another peripheral portion that does not mate with the interior surface of the tubular housing. In an exemplary embodiment, the first, second, third and further baffle elements may be positioned in corresponding different planes.

A method for conditioning feed gas has been described that includes heating an inlet stream of gas within a passageway; and impeding the flow of the inlet stream of gas within the passageway using a plurality of baffle elements that are positioned in different planes. In an exemplary embodiment, heating the inlet stream of gas within the passageway includes positioning a plurality of heating elements within the passageway. In an exemplary embodiment, impeding the flow of the inlet stream of gas within the passageway includes constricting the flow of the inlet stream of gas proximate the heating elements within the passageway. In an exemplary embodiment, impeding the flow of the inlet stream of gas within the passageway includes constricting the flow of the inlet stream of gas within the passageway. In an exemplary embodiment, impeding the flow of the inlet stream of gas within the passageway includes creating a serpentine flow of the inlet stream of gas within the passageway. In an exemplary embodiment, impeding the flow of the inlet stream of gas within the passageway further includes constricting the flow of the inlet stream of gas proximate the heating elements within the passageway. In an exemplary embodiment, the angular spacing between the planes of the baffle elements ranges from about 15 to 75 degrees. In an exemplary embodiment, the lateral spacing of the baffle elements within the passageway ranges from intimate contact to about several times the internal diameter of the passageway. In an exemplary embodiment, the method further includes shearing the flow of the inlet stream of gas within the passageway. In an exemplary embodiment, the method further includes flowing the inlet stream of gas within the passageway at an angle over one or more heating elements. In an exemplary embodiment, the method further includes mixing the inlet stream of gas within the passageway over one or more heating elements. In an exemplary embodiment, heating the inlet stream of gas within the passageway includes providing one or more heating elements within the passageway; and impeding the flow of the inlet stream of gas within the passageway includes causing the inlet stream of gas to flow in a direction transverse to the heating elements.

A system for conditioning feed gas has been described that includes means for heating an inlet stream of gas within a

passageway; and means for impeding the flow of the inlet stream of gas within the passageway using a plurality of baffle elements that are positioned in different planes. In an exemplary embodiment, the means for heating the inlet stream of gas within the passageway includes means for positioning a plurality of heating elements within the passageway. In an exemplary embodiment, the means for impeding the flow of the inlet stream of gas within the passageway includes means for constricting the flow of the inlet stream of gas proximate the heating elements within the passageway. In an exemplary embodiment, the means for impeding the flow of the inlet stream of gas within the passageway includes means for constricting the flow of the inlet stream of gas within the passageway. In an exemplary embodiment, the means for impeding the flow of the inlet stream of gas within the passageway includes means for creating a serpentine flow of the inlet stream of gas within the passageway. In an exemplary embodiment, the means for impeding the flow of the inlet stream of gas within the passageway further includes means for constricting the flow of the inlet stream of gas proximate the heating elements within the passageway. In an exemplary embodiment, the angular spacing between the planes of the baffle elements ranges from about 15 to 75 degrees. In an exemplary embodiment, the lateral spacing of the baffle elements within the passageway ranges from intimate contact to about several times the internal diameter of the passageway. In an exemplary embodiment, the system further includes means for shearing the flow of the inlet stream of gas within the passageway. In an exemplary embodiment, the system further includes means for flowing the inlet stream of gas within the passageway at an angle over one or more heating elements. In an exemplary embodiment, the system further includes means for mixing the inlet stream of gas within the passageway over one or more heating elements. In an exemplary embodiment, the means for heating the inlet stream of gas within the passageway includes providing one or more heating elements within the passageway; and the means for impeding the flow of the inlet stream of gas within the passageway includes causing the inlet stream of gas to flow in a direction transverse to the heating elements.

An apparatus for conditioning feed gas has been described that includes an outer tubular housing; an inner tubular housing that defines a passageway and is positioned within the outer tubular housing, wherein an end of the passageway is adapted to be operably coupled to an outlet stream of fluidic materials; a plurality of baffle assemblies positioned within the passageway of the inner tubular housing; one or more heating elements positioned within the passageway of the inner tubular housing; and an annular passageway defined between the inner and outer tubular housings, wherein an inlet of the annular passageway is adapted to be operably coupled to an inlet stream of fluidic material, and wherein an outlet of the annular passageway is operably coupled to another end of the passageway of the inner tubular housing; wherein one or more of the baffle assemblies comprise a first baffle element and a second baffle element; wherein the first and second baffle elements each define one or more passages; wherein the first and second baffle elements are positioned in different planes; and wherein one or more of the heating elements extend through one or more of the passageways of one or more of the first and second baffle elements of one or more of the baffle assemblies. In an exemplary embodiment, the outer tubular housing ranges from 4 inch, schedule 40 pipe to 24 inch, schedule 40 pipe; and the inner tubular housing ranges from 3 inch, schedule 10 pipe to 20 inch, schedule 10 pipe. In an exemplary embodiment, the outer tubular housing is fabricated from materials selected from the group consist-

25

ing of low carbon steel, 304 stainless steel, and 304H stainless steel; and the inner tubular housing is fabricated from materials selected from the group consisting of H grade stainless steel, 316H stainless steel, and chromoly steel. In an exemplary embodiment, the spacing of the baffles in a longitudinal direction within the passageway of the inner tubular housing ranges from about 2 to 60 inches. In an exemplary embodiment, the spacing of the baffle assemblies in a longitudinal direction within the passageway of the inner tubular housing is about equal to the internal diameter of the inner tubular housing. In an exemplary embodiment, the internal diameters of the passageways of the first and second baffle elements are greater than the external diameters of the corresponding heating elements. In an exemplary embodiment, the internal diameters of the passageways of the first and second baffle elements are at least about 10% greater than the external diameters of the corresponding heating elements. In an exemplary embodiment, the number of heating elements ranges from about 3 to 360. In an exemplary embodiment, the average center to center spacing of the heating elements ranges from about 1 to 5 inches. In an exemplary embodiment, the outside diameters of the heating elements are about 0.475 inches and the inside diameters of the corresponding passageways through the first and second baffle elements are about $\frac{1}{16}$ to about $\frac{1}{4}$ of an inch larger in diameter. In an exemplary embodiment, the inside diameters of the corresponding passageways through the first and second baffle elements are at least about $\frac{1}{4}$ of an inch larger in diameter to allow for easier assembly. In an exemplary embodiment, each of the first and second baffle elements comprise an outer peripheral arcuate portion that mates with the inner tubular housing and another outer peripheral portion that does not mate with the inner tubular housing. In an exemplary embodiment, the baffle assemblies and the inner tubular housing define a serpentine flow path for the passage of fluidic materials therethrough. In an exemplary embodiment, the angular spacing between the planes of the first and second baffle elements ranges from about 15 to 75 degrees. In an exemplary embodiment, the lateral spacing of the baffle assemblies within the passageway of the inner tubular housing ranges from intimate contact to about several times the internal diameter of the inner tubular housing. In an exemplary embodiment, the baffle assemblies are adapted to shear the flow of fluidic materials within the passageway of the inner tubular housing. In an exemplary embodiment, the baffle assemblies are adapted to cause the fluidic materials within the passageway of the inner tubular housing to flow over the heating elements at an angle to the heating elements. In an exemplary embodiment, the baffle assemblies are adapted to cause the fluidic materials within the passageway of the inner tubular housing to mix over the heating elements at an angle to the heating elements. In an exemplary embodiment, a heat transfer coefficient within the inner tubular housing ranges from about 12.3 to about 33 Btu/hr* ft^2 *° F. In an exemplary embodiment, an operating temperature of the heating elements ranges from about 757 to about 1147° F. In an exemplary embodiment, a heat transfer coefficient within the inner tubular housing ranges from about 12.3 to about 33 Btu/hr* ft^2 *° F.; and an operating temperature of the heating elements ranges from about 757 to about 1147° F.

A method for conditioning feed gas has been described that includes feeding an inlet stream of gas into an outer passageway in a first direction; then feeding the inlet stream of gas into an inner passageway, positioned within the outer passageway, in a second direction, in opposition to the first direction; heating the inlet stream of gas within the inner passageway; and impeding the flow of the inlet stream of gas within

26

the inner passageway using a plurality of baffle elements that are positioned in different planes. In an exemplary embodiment, the method further includes heating the inlet stream of gas within the outer passageway. In an exemplary embodiment, the method further includes heating the inlet stream of gas within the outer passageway by transmitting heat from the inlet stream of gas within the inner passageway. In an exemplary embodiment, heating the inlet stream of gas within the inner passageway comprises positioning a plurality of heating elements within the inner passageway. In an exemplary embodiment, impeding the flow of the inlet stream of gas within the inner passageway comprises constricting the flow of the inlet stream of gas proximate the heating elements within the inner passageway. In an exemplary embodiment, impeding the flow of the inlet stream of gas within the inner passageway comprises constricting the flow of the inlet stream of gas within the inner passageway. In an exemplary embodiment, impeding the flow of the inlet stream of gas within the inner passageway comprises creating a serpentine flow of the inlet stream of gas within the inner passageway. In an exemplary embodiment, impeding the flow of the inlet stream of gas within the inner passageway further comprises constricting the flow of the inlet stream of gas proximate the heating elements within the inner passageway. In an exemplary embodiment, the angular spacing between the planes of the baffle elements ranges from about 15 to 75 degrees. In an exemplary embodiment, the lateral spacing of the baffle elements within the inner passageway ranges from intimate contact to about several times the internal diameter of the inner tubular housing. In an exemplary embodiment, the method further includes shearing the flow of the inlet stream of gas within the inner passageway. In an exemplary embodiment, the method further includes flowing the inlet stream of gas within the inner passageway at an angle over one or more heating elements. In an exemplary embodiment, the method further includes mixing the inlet stream of gas within the inner passageway over one or more heating elements. In an exemplary embodiment, heating the inlet stream of gas within the inner passageway comprises providing one or more heating elements within the inner passageway; and impeding the flow of the inlet stream of gas within the inner passageway comprises causing the inlet stream of gas to flow in a direction transverse to the heating elements. In an exemplary embodiment, a heat transfer coefficient within the inner passageway ranges from about 12.3 to about 33 Btu/hr* ft^2 *° F. In an exemplary embodiment, heating the inlet stream within the inner passageway comprises positioning one or more heating elements within the inner passageway; and wherein an operating temperature of the heating elements ranges from about 757 to about 1147° F. In an exemplary embodiment, heating the inlet stream within the inner passageway comprises positioning one or more heating elements within the inner passageway; a heat transfer coefficient within the inner passageway ranges from about 12.3 to about 33 Btu/hr* ft^2 *° F.; and an operating temperature of the heating elements ranges from about 757 to about 1147° F.

A system for conditioning feed gas has been described that includes means for feeding an inlet stream of gas into an outer passageway in a first direction; means for then feeding the inlet stream of gas into an inner passageway in a second direction, in opposition to the first direction; means for heating the inlet stream of gas within the inner passageway; and means for impeding the flow of the inlet stream of gas within the inner passageway. In an exemplary embodiment, the system further includes means for heating the inlet stream of gas within the outer passageway. In an exemplary embodiment, the system further includes means for heating the inlet stream

of gas within the outer passageway by transmitting heat from the inlet stream of gas within the inner passageway. In an exemplary embodiment, means for heating the inlet stream of gas within the inner passageway comprises means for positioning a plurality of heating elements within the inner passageway. In an exemplary embodiment, means for impeding the flow of the inlet stream of gas within the inner passageway comprises means for constricting the flow of the inlet stream of gas proximate the heating elements within the inner passageway. In an exemplary embodiment, means for impeding the flow of the inlet stream of gas within the inner passageway comprises means for constricting the flow of the inlet stream of gas within the inner passageway. In an exemplary embodiment, means for impeding the flow of the inlet stream of gas within the inner passageway comprises means for creating a serpentine flow of the inlet stream of gas within the inner passageway. In an exemplary embodiment, means for impeding the flow of the inlet stream of gas within the inner passageway comprises means for constricting the flow of the inlet stream of gas proximate the heating elements within the inner passageway. In an exemplary embodiment, the system further includes means for shearing the flow of the inlet stream of gas within the inner passageway. In an exemplary embodiment, the system further includes means for flowing the inlet stream of gas within the inner passageway at an angle to heating elements. In an exemplary embodiment, the system further includes means for mixing the inlet stream of gas within the inner passageway over heating elements. In an exemplary embodiment, means for heating the inlet stream of gas within the inner passageway comprises means for providing one or more heating elements within the inner passageway; and means for impeding the flow of the inlet stream of gas within the inner passageway comprises means for causing the inlet stream of gas to flow in a direction transverse to the heating elements. In an exemplary embodiment, a heat transfer coefficient within the inner passageway ranges from about 12.3 to about 33 Btu/hr* ft^2 *° F. In an exemplary embodiment, an operating temperature of the means for heating the inlet stream of gas within the inner passageway ranges from about 757 to about 1147° F. In an exemplary embodiment, a heat transfer coefficient within the inner passageway ranges from about 12.3 to about 33 Btu/hr* ft^2 *° F.; and an operating temperature of the means for heating the inlet stream of gas within the inner passageway ranges from about 757 to about 1147° F.

A baffle assembly for use in a tubular housing has been described that includes a first baffle element that defines one or more first passageways; a second baffle element that defines one or more second passageways; and a hinge coupled between the first and second baffle elements for permitting the first and second baffle elements to be positioned in different planes; wherein the first baffle element comprises an outer peripheral arcuate portion that mates with a portion of the interior surface of the tubular housing and another peripheral portion that does not mate with the interior surface of the tubular housing; and wherein the second baffle element comprises an outer peripheral arcuate portion that mates with a portion of the interior surface of the tubular housing and another peripheral portion that does not mate with the interior surface of the tubular housing. In an exemplary embodiment, the first and second baffle elements are positioned in a common plane, the baffle assembly comprises a circular outer peripheral profile. In an exemplary embodiment, the first and second baffle elements are positioned in a common plane, the baffle assembly comprises a semi-circular outer peripheral profile. In an exemplary embodiment, the hinge defines one or more passageways. In an exemplary embodiment, the hinge

comprises a base member; a first hinge coupled to the base member for pivoting the first baffle element; and a second hinge coupled to the base member for pivoting the second baffle element. In an exemplary embodiment, the baffle assembly further includes a third baffle element pivotally coupled to the hinge that defines one or more third passageways; and a fourth baffle element pivotally coupled to the hinge that defines one or more fourth passageways; wherein the third baffle element comprises an outer peripheral arcuate portion that mates with a portion of the interior surface of the tubular housing and another peripheral portion that does not mate with the interior surface of the tubular housing; and wherein the fourth baffle element comprises an outer peripheral arcuate portion that mates with a portion of the interior surface of the tubular housing and another peripheral portion that does not mate with the interior surface of the tubular housing. In an exemplary embodiment, the first, second, third and further baffle elements may be positioned in corresponding different planes.

A method for controlling the flow of a feed gas through a passageway containing one or more heating elements has been described that includes impeding the flow of the inlet stream of gas within the passageway using a plurality of baffle elements that are positioned in different planes. In an exemplary embodiment, impeding the flow of the inlet stream of gas within the passageway comprises constricting the flow of the inlet stream of gas proximate the heating elements within the passageway. In an exemplary embodiment, impeding the flow of the inlet stream of gas within the passageway comprises constricting the flow of the inlet stream of gas within the passageway. In an exemplary embodiment, impeding the flow of the inlet stream of gas within the passageway comprises creating a serpentine flow of the inlet stream of gas within the passageway. In an exemplary embodiment, impeding the flow of the inlet stream of gas within the passageway further comprises constricting the flow of the inlet stream of gas proximate the heating elements within the passageway. In an exemplary embodiment, the angular spacing between the planes of the baffle elements ranges from about 15 to 75 degrees. In an exemplary embodiment, the lateral spacing of the baffle elements within the passageway ranges from intimate contact to about several times the internal diameter of the passageway. In an exemplary embodiment, the method further includes shearing the flow of the inlet stream of gas within the passageway. In an exemplary embodiment, the method further includes flowing the inlet stream of gas within the passageway at an angle over one or more heating elements. In an exemplary embodiment, the method further includes mixing the inlet stream of gas within the passageway over one or more heating elements. In an exemplary embodiment, impeding the flow of the inlet stream of gas within the passageway comprises causing the inlet stream of gas to flow in a direction transverse to the heating elements.

A system for controlling the flow of a feed gas through a passageway containing one or more heating elements has been described that includes means for introducing the feed gas into the passageway; and means for impeding the flow of the inlet stream of gas within the passageway using a plurality of baffle elements that are positioned in different planes. In an exemplary embodiment, means for impeding the flow of the inlet stream of gas within the passageway comprises means for constricting the flow of the inlet stream of gas proximate the heating elements within the passageway. In an exemplary embodiment, means for impeding the flow of the inlet stream of gas within the passageway comprises means for constricting the flow of the inlet stream of gas within the passageway. In an exemplary embodiment, means for impeding the flow of the inlet stream of gas within the passageway comprises means for creating a serpentine flow of the inlet stream of gas within the passageway. In an exemplary embodiment, means for impeding the flow of the inlet stream of gas within the passageway comprises means for shearing the flow of the inlet stream of gas within the passageway. In an exemplary embodiment, means for impeding the flow of the inlet stream of gas within the passageway comprises means for flowing the inlet stream of gas within the passageway at an angle over one or more heating elements. In an exemplary embodiment, means for impeding the flow of the inlet stream of gas within the passageway comprises means for mixing the inlet stream of gas within the passageway over one or more heating elements. In an exemplary embodiment, means for impeding the flow of the inlet stream of gas within the passageway comprises means for causing the inlet stream of gas to flow in a direction transverse to the heating elements.

the inlet stream of gas within the passageway comprises means for creating a serpentine flow of the inlet stream of gas within the passageway. In an exemplary embodiment, means for impeding the flow of the inlet stream of gas within the passageway further comprises means for constricting the flow of the inlet stream of gas proximate the heating elements within the passageway. In an exemplary embodiment, the angular spacing between the planes of the baffle elements ranges from about 15 to 75 degrees. In an exemplary embodiment, the lateral spacing of the baffle elements within the passageway ranges from intimate contact to about several times the internal diameter of the passageway. In an exemplary embodiment the system further includes means for shearing the flow of the inlet stream of gas within the passageway. In an exemplary embodiment, the system further includes means for flowing the inlet stream of gas within the passageway at an angle over one or more heating elements. In an exemplary embodiment, the system further includes means for mixing the inlet stream of gas within the passageway over one or more heating elements. In an exemplary embodiment, means for impeding the flow of the inlet stream of gas within the passageway comprises means for causing the inlet stream of gas to flow in a direction transverse to the heating elements.

An apparatus for conditioning feed gas has been described that includes a tubular housing that defines a passageway, wherein an end of the passageway is adapted to be operably coupled to an inlet stream of fluidic materials and another end of the passageway is adapted to be operably coupled to an outlet stream of materials; a plurality of baffle assemblies positioned within the passageway of the tubular housing; and one or more heating elements positioned within the passageway of the tubular housing; wherein one or more of the baffle assemblies comprise a first baffle element and a second baffle element; wherein the first and second baffle elements each define one or more passages; wherein the first and second baffle elements are positioned in different planes; and wherein one or more of the heating elements extend through one or more of the passageways of one or more of the first and second baffle elements of one or more of the baffle assemblies. In an exemplary embodiment, the spacing of the baffles in a longitudinal direction within the passageway of the tubular housing ranges from about 2 to 60 inches. In an exemplary embodiment, the spacing of the baffle assemblies in a longitudinal direction within the passageway of the tubular housing is about equal to the internal diameter of the tubular housing. In an exemplary embodiment, the internal diameters of the passageways of the first and second baffle elements are greater than the external diameters of the corresponding heating elements. In an exemplary embodiment, the internal diameters of the passageways of the first and second baffle elements are at least about 10%, greater than the external diameters of the corresponding heating elements. In an exemplary embodiment, the number of heating elements ranges from about 3 to 360. In an exemplary embodiment, the average center to center spacing of the heating elements ranges from about 1 to 5 inches. In an exemplary embodiment, the outside diameters of the heating elements are about 0.475 inches and the inside diameters of the corresponding passageways through the first and second baffle elements are about $\frac{1}{16}$ to about $\frac{1}{4}$ of an inch larger in diameter. In an exemplary embodiment, the inside diameters of the corresponding passageways through the first and second baffle elements are at least about $\frac{1}{4}$ of an inch larger in diameter to allow for easier assembly. In an exemplary embodiment, each of the first and second baffle elements comprise an outer peripheral arcuate portion that mates with the tubular housing and another outer

peripheral portion that does not mate with the tubular housing. In an exemplary embodiment, the baffle assemblies and the inner tubular housing define a serpentine flow path for the passage of fluidic materials therethrough. In an exemplary embodiment, the angular spacing between the planes of the first and second baffle elements ranges from about 15 to 75 degrees. In an exemplary embodiment, the lateral spacing of the baffle assemblies within the passageway of the tubular housing ranges from intimate contact to about several times the internal diameter of the tubular housing. In an exemplary embodiment, the baffle assemblies are adapted to shear the flow of fluidic materials within the passageway of the tubular housing. In an exemplary embodiment, the baffle assemblies are adapted to cause the fluidic materials within the passageway of the tubular housing to flow over the heating elements at an angle to the heating elements. In an exemplary embodiment, the baffle assemblies are adapted to cause the fluidic materials within the passageway of the tubular housing to mix over the heating elements at an angle to the heating elements. In an exemplary embodiment, a heat transfer coefficient within the tubular housing ranges from about 12.3 to about 33 Btu/hr*f²*° F. In an exemplary embodiment, an operating temperature of the heating elements ranges from about 757 to about 1147° F. In an exemplary embodiment, a heat transfer coefficient within the tubular housing ranges from about 12.3 to about 33 Btu/hr*f²*° F.; and an operating temperature of the heating elements ranges from about 757 to about 1147° F.

A method for conditioning feed gas has been described that includes heating an inlet stream of gas within a passageway; and impeding the flow of the inlet stream of gas within the passageway using a plurality of baffle elements that are positioned in different planes. In an exemplary embodiment, heating the inlet stream of gas within the passageway comprises positioning a plurality of heating elements within the passageway. In an exemplary embodiment, impeding the flow of the inlet stream of gas within the passageway comprises constricting the flow of the inlet stream of gas proximate the heating elements within the passageway. In an exemplary embodiment, impeding the flow of the inlet stream of gas within the passageway comprises constricting the flow of the inlet stream of gas within the passageway. In an exemplary embodiment, impeding the flow of the inlet stream of gas within the passageway comprises creating a serpentine flow of the inlet stream of gas within the passageway. In an exemplary embodiment, impeding the flow of the inlet stream of gas within the passageway further comprises constricting the flow of the inlet stream of gas proximate the heating elements within the passageway. In an exemplary embodiment, the angular spacing between the planes of the baffle elements ranges from about 15 to 75 degrees. In an exemplary embodiment, the lateral spacing of the baffle elements within the passageway ranges from intimate contact to about several times the internal diameter of the passageway. In an exemplary embodiment, the method further includes shearing the flow of the inlet stream of gas within the passageway. In an exemplary embodiment, the method further includes flowing the inlet stream of gas within the passageway at an angle over one or more heating elements. In an exemplary embodiment, the method further includes mixing the inlet stream of gas within the passageway over one or more heating elements. In an exemplary embodiment, heating the inlet stream of gas within the passageway comprises providing one or more heating elements within the passageway; and impeding the flow of the inlet stream of gas within the passageway comprises causing the inlet stream of gas to flow in a direction transverse to the heating elements. In an exemplary embodiment, a heat transfer coefficient within the passageway ranges from about

31

12.3 to about 33 Btu/hr* ft^2 *° F. In an exemplary embodiment, an operating temperature of the heating elements ranges from about 757 to about 1147° F. In an exemplary embodiment, a heat transfer coefficient within the passageway ranges from about 12.3 to about 33 Btu/hr* ft^2 *° F.; and an operating temperature of the heating elements ranges from about 757 to about 1147° F.

A system for conditioning feed gas has been described that includes means for heating an inlet stream of gas within a passageway; and means for impeding the flow of the inlet stream of gas within the passageway using a plurality of baffle elements that are positioned in different planes. In an exemplary embodiment, means for heating the inlet stream of gas within the passageway comprises means for positioning a plurality of heating elements within the passageway. In an exemplary embodiment, means for impeding the flow of the inlet stream of gas within the passageway comprises means for constricting the flow of the inlet stream of gas proximate the heating elements within the passageway. In an exemplary embodiment, means for impeding the flow of the inlet stream of gas within the passageway comprises means for constricting the flow of the inlet stream of gas within the passageway. In an exemplary embodiment, means for impeding the flow of the inlet stream of gas within the passageway comprises means for creating a serpentine flow of the inlet stream of gas within the passageway. In an exemplary embodiment, means for impeding the flow of the inlet stream of gas within the passageway further comprises means for constricting the flow of the inlet stream of gas proximate the heating elements within the passageway. In an exemplary embodiment, the angular spacing between the planes of the baffle elements ranges from about 15 to 75 degrees. In an exemplary embodiment, the lateral spacing of the baffle elements within the passageway ranges from intimate contact to about several times the internal diameter of the passageway. In an exemplary embodiment, the system further includes means for shearing the flow of the inlet stream of gas within the passageway. In an exemplary embodiment, the system further includes means for flowing the inlet stream of gas within the passageway at an angle over one or more heating elements. In an exemplary embodiment, the system further includes means for mixing the inlet stream of gas within the passageway over one or more heating elements. In an exemplary embodiment, means for heating the inlet stream of gas within the passageway comprises providing one or more heating elements within the passageway; and wherein means for impeding the flow of the inlet stream of gas within the passageway comprises means for causing the inlet stream of gas to flow in a direction transverse to the heating elements. In an exemplary embodiment, a heat transfer coefficient within the passageway ranges from about 12.3 to about 33 Btu/hr* ft^2 *° F. In an exemplary embodiment, an operating temperature of the heating elements ranges from about 757 to about 1147° F. In an exemplary embodiment, a heat transfer coefficient within the passageway ranges from about 12.3 to about 33 Btu/hr* ft^2 *° F.; and an operating temperature of the heating elements ranges from about 757 to about 1147° F.

It is understood that variations may be made in the above without departing from the scope of the invention. While specific embodiments have been shown and described, modifications can be made by one skilled in the art without departing from the spirit or teaching of this invention. The embodiments as described are exemplary only and are not limiting. Many variations and modifications are possible and are within the scope of the invention. Furthermore, one or more aspects of the exemplary embodiments may be omitted or combined with one or more aspects of the other exemplary

32

embodiments. Accordingly, the scope of protection is not limited to the embodiments described, but is only limited by the claims that follow, the scope of which shall include all equivalents of the subject matter of the claims.

The invention claimed is:

1. A method for heating fluidic materials, comprising: within a common vessel, heating liquid materials within a lower portion of the common vessel using first immersion heaters and heating gaseous materials within an upper portion of the common vessel using second immersion heaters.
2. The method of claim 1, further comprising: controlling a level of liquid materials within the lower portion of the common vessel.
3. The method of claim 1, wherein heating gaseous materials within the upper portion of the common vessel comprises: heating gaseous materials within the upper portion of the common vessel within another vessel positioned within the upper portion of the common vessel.
4. The method of claim 3, further comprising: coalescing liquids within the interior of the other vessel.
5. The method of claim 4, further comprising: exhausting coalesced liquids out of the interior of the other vessel and into a lower end portion of the common vessel.
6. The method of claim 3, further comprising: impeding the flow of materials within at least one of the common vessel and the other vessel using a plurality of baffle elements that are positioned in different planes.
7. The method of claim 6, wherein impeding the flow of materials within at least one of the common vessel and the other vessel using a plurality of baffle elements that are positioned in different planes comprises constricting the flow of the materials proximate the heaters within at least one of the common vessel and the other vessel.
8. The method of claim 6, wherein impeding the flow of the materials within at least one of the common vessel and the other vessel comprises creating a serpentine flow of the materials within at least one of the common vessel and the other vessel.
9. The method of claim 6, wherein the angular spacing between the planes of the baffle elements ranges from about 15 to 75 degrees.
10. The method of claim 6, wherein the lateral spacing of the baffle elements within at least one of the common vessel and the other vessel ranges from intimate contact to about several times the internal diameter of at least one of the common vessel and the other vessel.
11. The method of claim 6, further comprising: shearing the flow of the materials within at least one of the common vessel and the other vessel.
12. The method of claim 6, further comprising: flowing the materials within at least one of the common vessel and the other vessel at an angle over one or more heaters.
13. The method of claim 6, further comprising: mixing the materials within at least one of the common vessel and the other vessel over one or more heaters.
14. The method of claim 6, wherein impeding the flow of materials within at least one of the common vessel and the other vessel comprises causing the materials within at least one of the common vessel and the other vessel to flow in a direction transverse to the heaters.
15. The method of claim 6, wherein a heat transfer coefficient within at least one of the common vessel and the other vessel ranges from about 12.3 to about 33 Btu/hr* ft^2 *° F.

16. The method of claim 6, wherein an operating temperature of the heaters ranges from about 757 to about 1147° F.

17. The method of claim 6, wherein a heat transfer coefficient within at least one of the common vessel and the other vessel ranges from about 12.3 to about 33 Btu/hr·ft²° F.; and
5 wherein an operating temperature of the heaters ranges from about 757 to about 1147° F.

18. A method of operating a distillation column assembly, comprising:

within one or more common vessels, heating liquid materials within a lower portion of each of the common vessels using first immersion heaters and heating gaseous materials within an upper portion of one or more of the common vessels using second immersion heaters;
condensing at least a portion of the gaseous materials; and
15 reboiling at least a portion of the liquid materials.

* * * * *